

SPARKS 1931

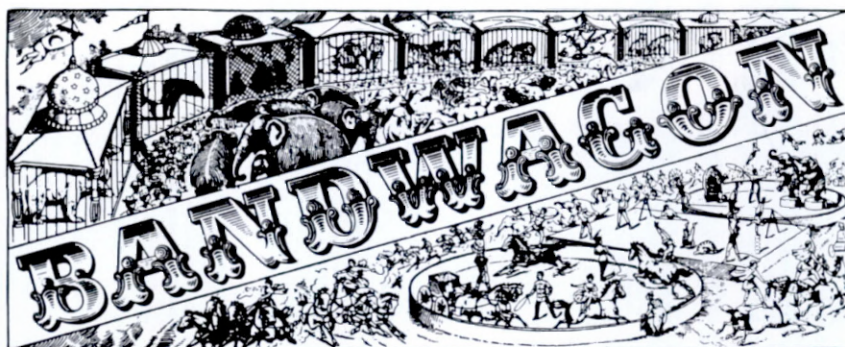
BANDWAGON

JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

DAN RICE 1937
HARRIS 1938



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1984



THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1984

Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Editor

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor and Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor

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This Month's Cover

Our cover this month features a magnificent example of the printer's art, and one of the earliest color wood block circus posters in existence. Measuring a bit over nine feet long by about six and a half feet wide, this remarkable bill was printed by Samuel Booth in New York with the engraving done by Thomas W. Strong. It was initially designed for the 1850 season, but it is apparent that these particular sheets were posted in 1851.

The A. Turner & Co. Circus was founded by Aaron Turner (1790?-1854) of Danbury, Connecticut in 1826 when he joined with Nathan A. Howes and Sylvester Reynolds to frame what was only the second tented circus ever to tour this country. This venture was apparently the first show with which any of them were connected. In the 1830s, the title was Columbian Circus, and later the American Arena or Circus Co. By 1840 his sons Napoleon and Timothy were listed as proprietors, an indication the senior Turner was less active in the man-

agement of the enterprise, and in 1844 James M. June bought into the show and its title became June & Turner. By 1849 June was out, and Edward Ganung was in charge, a connection still in effect when this poster was used in 1850 and 1851.

This bill was recently donated to the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin by CHS members Jim and Millicent Dunwoody of Sarasota, Florida, and is reproduced here in its original colors. The *Bandwagon* staff thanks Stuart Thayer for background information on Turner.

New Members

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Santa Barbara, Calif. 93101	
Rev. Charles Schluter	2868
129 W. Gorham	
Madison, Wisconsin 53703	
Thomas Day	2869
Box 105A R.D. 2	
Germansville, Pa. 18053	

Terry S. Lewis 2870

4912 N. Sullinger Ave.
Tucson, Arizona 85705

Blake R. Kellogg 2871

208 N. Allen St.
Madison, Wisconsin 53705

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION as required by 39 U.S.C. 3685.
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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Publisher. (9-30-84)

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HOLD YOUR HORSES— THE ELEPHANTS ARE HERE!

In Aug., 1983, during RB Circus Cow Palace Engagement, my good friend Gunther Gebel-Williams, viewed the original African Elephant art $\frac{3}{4}$ finished and commented, "The real African elephant—absolutely so real—I like it very much—good luck."



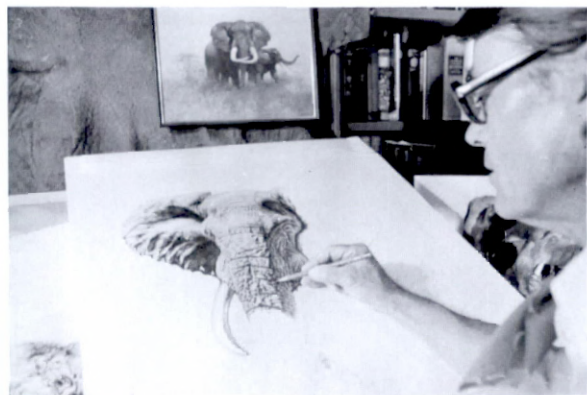
In August, 1984, Axel Gautier, Ringling's great elephant trainer came to visit me at our ranch.

He was interested in the final work on the elephant art and commented: "You know the elephant—no mistake—excellent—best I have seen yet—now please do the Asian elephant!"

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Seasons Greetings



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AND
THE STAFF AND PERFORMERS



Season's Greetings

*from the Staff
of*

**CIRCUS
WORLD**

MUSEUM
BARABOO, WISCONSIN

SPARKS CIRCUS

SEASON OF 1931

by Joseph T. Bradbury

The early weeks of 1931 were filled with anxiety, not only for John Ringling whose mighty circus empire of six railroad circuses had toured in 1930 but also for the numerous staffers, department heads and hundreds of employees whose jobs were in real jeopardy. Early rumors had both the John Robinson and Sparks circuses shelved and changes in the others. Only Ringling-Barnum and Sells-Floto, which still had Tom Mix, the popular movie cowboy under contract, appeared to be safe. The first full season, 1930, of the great depression had been extremely rough on John Ringling. Although the Big One as well as Sells-Floto had done okay, the rest of the pack had lost heavily.

The 20 car Sparks Circus was in Sarasota sharing winterquarters with Ringling-Barnum and for the first few weeks virtually nothing concerning the fate of the show made it to the public press or trade publications. A short note in the January 3, 1931 *Billboard* said that Jake Posey, who was in charge of the Sparks baggage stock in 1930, had been transferred to the Al G. Barnes Circus and would be with that show in 1931.

The February 7, 1931 *Billboard* in a short article advised that the work of preparing Sparks Circus for the road was progressing rapidly at the Sarasota quarters. The information was said to have come direct from Ringling officials at the quarters and the author concluded that it set to rest rumors that Sparks would not go out.

A week later the *Billboard* said that George V. Connors had been re-engaged to manage the Sparks sideshow, making it his ninth year with that show. LaVerne Hauser McClain had recovered from illness and was now at the Sparks quarters working on her horse acts. It was her fifth season with Sparks.

Finally, the February 21, 1931 *Billboard* gave some real details as to the Sparks situation for 1931. It said that Ira M. Watts had been re-engaged to



Front cover of Sparks Circus Magazine and Daily Review, Season of 1931. Joe Bradbury Collection.

manage the show and that equipment was being prepared and personnel lined up. The show which heretofore moved on 20 cars would now be on 15—14 back and 1 ahead. The 14 cars back

Sparks Circus seven loaded flat cars at Sarasota Quarters ready for the 1931 season. Note at extreme right the Sparks Mt. Vernon built flats are coupled to Ringling-Barnum's Warren flats. The Ringling-Barnum portion of the train will move to that show's initial canvas stand in Brooklyn, N.Y. while the Sparks cars will be dropped off at Chester, Pa. for the 1931 season's opening stand. Note the tarp covered wagon fourth from left appears to be the Dancing Girls Tableau. Photo by Herbert Sicks.

consisted of 7 flats, 4 stocks (including 1 car for elephants), and 3 sleepers. The big top was the same as used last season and there were 48 head of baggage stock.

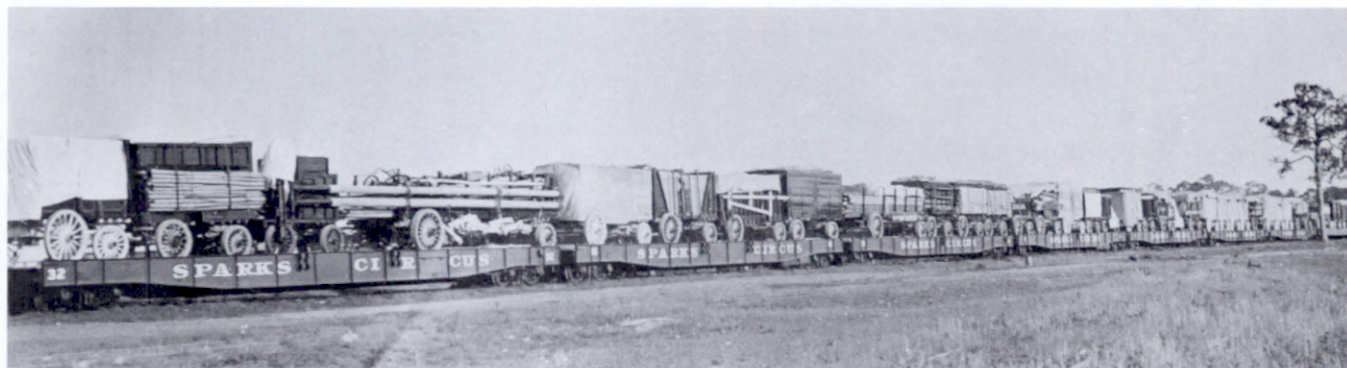
Compared to the rest of the Ringling owned shows there was still very little coverage of Sparks in the *Billboard* prior to opening of the season. In early April it was announced that Charles Coles would be trainmaster; Bert Bennett, steward; Ralph Noble, boss canvasman; and Curly Stewart and Harry Ruddy as 24 hour men.

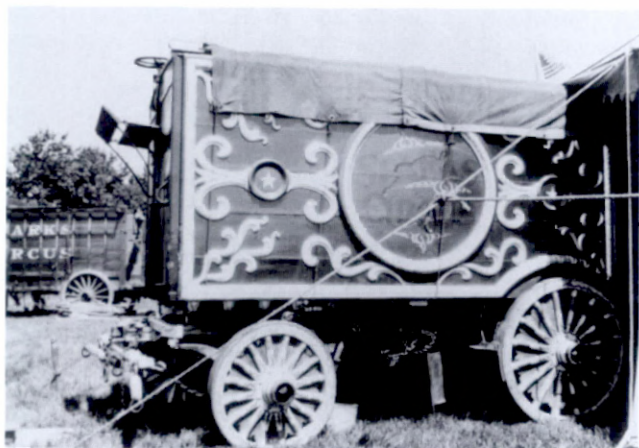
Also in April the trade publications had it that Mr. and Mrs. W. E. DeBerrie would soon leave the Baltimore Dime Museum where he had been manager and his wife cashier, and join Sparks for the 1931 season. A later report had it that DeBerrie would manage the sideshow but that proved to be incorrect as George Connors, as originally reported, was in charge of that department on opening day.

A personnel announcement made just a short time before the season began said that Eddie Jackson, after two seasons with the Ringling-Barnum press department where he handled the "country papers," had been transferred to Sparks Circus as story man, one week ahead of show. It was also announced that Arthur Digg would be manager of the Sparks No. 1 advertising car and would have a total of 19 in the crew.

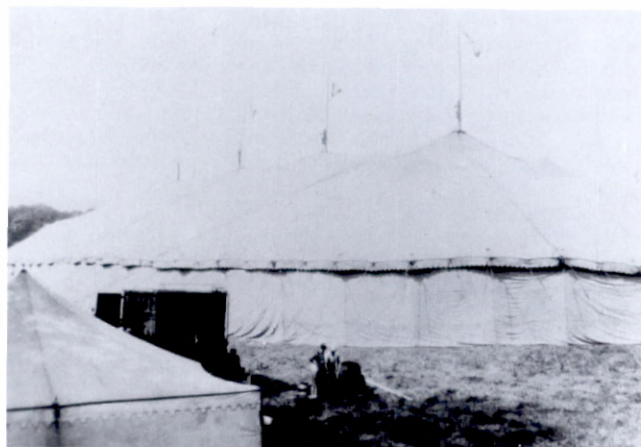
The show's official "call" advertisement appeared in the April 25 *Billboard*. It read as follows: "CALL. SPARKS CIRCUS. Season opens Saturday, May 9, Chester, Pa. Show train leaves Sarasota, Fla., May 1. Rehearsals Chester, Pa., beginning 2 P.M., May 6. Want stake driver man. Chief House, write Ralph Noble, boss canvasman. Can place picture man."

A short note in the May 2 *Billboard* confirmed the Sparks opening in Chester, Pa., May 9, but then dropped the





Horse and Jockey tableau wagon on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1931. This wagon housed the "canned music" apparatus used that season. Note the cen-



Sparks Circus big top on the lot, season of 1931. Clayton Hawkes photo from the Allaire Collection.

tral carved figures have been removed and the show's title painted inside the oval. Clayton Hawkes photo from the Allaire Collection.

real bombshell. It was announced that the Sparks show would not have a band, but instead would use phonograph records which would be amplified. The new system would be referred to as "canned music," a term which has been used since then and persists even to this day. The displacement of the live band was a drastic move in those days, especially for a 15 car railroad show, but it was done to save not only money but also considerable space in the show's sleepers.

The following chart details the reduction of the Sparks train to 15 cars in 1931 from the 20 used the previous season, showing number and type of car involved.

	Cars		
	1930	Eliminated	1931
Advance	1	0	1
Flats	9	2	7
Stocks	5	1	4
Sleepers	5	2	3
Totals	20	5	15

The color scheme of the flats and stock cars which in 1929 and 1930 had been yellow (or light orange) with dark (presumably red) lettering was changed back to that used in 1928. Flats and stocks were painted a dark orange with lettering in white. Sleepers were red with white lettering and the advertising car also appears to have been in the same colors.

Although we are very fortunate to have a beautiful side view picturing all seven loaded flat cars, regrettably there has been no photos to turn up showing all of the stocks or sleepers. Since the performance in 1931 was pretty much on par with that of 1930 and the physical layout not too greatly reduced it seems strange that all of the show's personnel could be accommodated in only three sleeping cars, but evidently that was the case. The elimination of the 15-20 bandsmen saved some space but with two less sleepers in 1931 quite a number of other personnel had to be involved. In contrast it seems the show

probably could have gotten by with only 3 stock cars, assuming the show had 48 head of baggage stock as reported. It appears it could have done with considerably fewer horses, especially since the show had two Mack trucks and Malter McClain's elephants had been active in helping move the wagons to and from the lot in recent seasons. In 1973 I did a short piece on the 1931 Sparks show and speculated that the reported numbers of stocks and sleepers had to be in reverse but since then nothing has turned up to support that theory, so for the official record here, the numbers and type of cars in the 1931 Sparks train will remain as originally reported in the *Billboard*. Hopefully, some "new" photo will emerge which will clearly settle this question.

With the aid of a powerful glass and careful study of the photo printed here showing the Sparks 7 loaded flat cars one can spot approximately 32 vehicles, including the two Mack trucks. Although most of the baggage wagons can be identified, canvas tarps make it difficult to determine their type. In any event the show carried about 10 less vehicles than when it moved on 20 cars the previous season and used 9 rather than the current 7 flat cars. More speculation is necessary to say exactly what the 10 dropped vehicles were, but in all probability they included 4 cages, the Dolphin tableau wagon, and 5 baggage wagons.

As we earlier learned in this series even though the show did not parade in 1930 all of the ex-parade wagons were carried with exception of the steam calliope. In 1931 the Stage Curtains and Clown tableau was again used as the grandstand ticket wagon, as it had been the previous year, but it was painted in a different color scheme, this time being basically red instead of white. (Note: This clear contrast of paint schemes of the grandstand ticket wagon is an excellent guide for determining whether a

photo was taken in 1930 or 1931.) The Horse & Jockey tableau wagon was also carried in 1931 and it housed the "canned music" equipment. The wagon was spotted in the position inside the big top formerly occupied by the band. The carvings on the sides of the wagon were removed and the disposition of same is not known to this author. Although there are no photos to verify it appears that in the photo showing the loaded flats the Dancing Girls tableau is the first wagon loaded on the second flat car from the left. Although completely covered with a canvas tarp the profile of the vehicle is that of the Dancing Girls, of course with the modified skyboard it had in 1930. All of the tableau wagons are thus accounted for with exception of the Dolphin and it is believed to have remained in the Sarasota quarters. Although there are no photos to prove the fact, it is felt the little air calliope probably did go on the road in 1931. This belief is maintained primarily by the appearance of the air calliope parked next to a group of Sparks wagons at the Sarasota quarters, although it is readily conceded there could be some other reason for its positioning there.

In 1930 and for several years before Sparks had carried 12 cages in the menagerie. As noted earlier it appears there were only 8 in 1931. Six of these would have been used for the three wild animal acts in the steel arena, lions, tigers and leopards. These acts had been intact and on the show for several seasons. In 1928 a cage list showed that two cages were used to house the animals for each act and this probably had not changed in 1931. According to the show's press department, Franz Woska worked 7 lions and 9 tigers in separate acts, and LaVerne McClain 7 leopards. Two other animal acts which had been present in recent seasons but were not in the 1931 program were polar bears and sea lions. Since trained monkeys appeared in several numbers their cage

would have certainly been in the menagerie which would bring the cage count up to 7. The 8th cage could have contained some of the non-working animals carried in recent seasons, deer, kangaroo, panther, ostrich, or hyena, or even the polar bears or sea lions even though they were no longer worked in the performance.

The 1931 Sparks elephant herd had the same nine which had been carried the past two seasons. They were Sparks Queen, Topsy, Myrtle, Bonnie (sometimes spelled Bunnie), Sparks Babe, Sparks Mary, Alice, Barnum Queen, and Julie. All were Asiatic females. Six were large animals but Sparks Mary, Alice, and Julie were rather small youngsters. In the 1929 article Chang Reynolds provided the interesting history of each of the six large elephants.

Just recently a letter turned up after having been "lost" in my files for many years. Actually it was a copy for me of a letter written by John Hanly of Charleston, W. Va. to the late Bill Woodcock Sr. and dated January 14, 1958. It had been in response to an article I had published in a 1957 *White Tops* issue of the Sparks Circus season of 1928. The letter provides a little background on one of the Sparks young elephants named Julie. It reads as follows.

"Dear Bill:

"Little did I ever think that I would be giving you information on a bull which you do not possess but here goes.

"In Joseph T. Bradbury's article on the Sparks Show, he mentions fact that you remember a punk bull named Julie on the Show but do not know her history, so here it is for I remember it quite well. In 1926 Dr. Jim Davidson was leisurely framing a wagon show in Greenup, Kentucky, for the 1927 season using the title Davidson Brothers Circus. When I say wagon show, I mean wagon show, for he depended entirely on horses and mules to move the show. In 1926, the Doctor bought the above mentioned little bull through a dealer in New York and he accepted delivery on

her in July and of all things, named her July. The Davidson Show closed in the middle of the 1927 season and this little bull was sold to Charlie Sparks and you as a bull man, can readily see why her name was changed to Julie after she reached the Sparks Show.

Signed (John Hanley)

Additional lead stock of the 1931 Sparks show consisted of 4 or 5 camels and a like number of zebras.

The show carried approximately 25 head or ring stock, down from previous seasons. Also considerably few baggage horses were on the show, and as noted earlier, even the number of 48 given in the *Billboard* seems too high. Two very fine Mack trucks were carried. The author has personal memories of the Sparks Macks moving two heavy baggage wagons at a fast clip on the street enroute to the lot.

The color scheme of the baggage wagons and Macks was red with white lettering and numbering. Cages were mainly red with gold trim.

In mid-March the press announced John Ringling's plans for the coming season. He would tour five railroad circuses, one less than 1930. John Robinson which had moved on 25 cars the previous year would not go out but would remain in its Peru, Indiana quarters. Sells-Floto would be cut from 40 to 35 cars and Sparks from 20 to 15. Both Hagenbeck-Wallace and Al G. Barnes would remain on 30 cars each and Ringling-Barnum on 90. John Ringling's circus empire would be moving on 200 cars, some 35 less than in 1930. Only one major managerial change occurred. In 1930 Danny Odom had managed Hagenbeck-Wallace and Jess Adkins, John Robinson. Odom now retired and Adkins was named to head Hagenbeck-Wallace. The list of managers for 1931 thus read as follows: Ringling-Barnum, Carl Hathaway; Sells-Floto, Zack Terrell; Hagenbeck-Wallace, Jess Adkins; Al G. Barnes, S. L. Cronin; Sparks, Ira Watts.

Businesswise, the nation's economy

continued to worsen as the 1931 season approached. The great depression came on gradually for most of the country, although the stock market crash back on Black Friday in October 1929 which started it certainly had the impact of a sudden, violent explosion. But for business in general the depression years saw things gradually go downhill until so called rock bottom was reached in July 1932. There was little optimism among circus owners that the situation would soon improve. As had John Ringling, most of the other circus owners retrenched in anticipation of another bum season.

The circus season was now at hand. In addition to the Ringling owned shows there were two other railers ready to go out, both on fewer cars than the year before. Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. rolled on 15 cars and the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West, reorganized and retrenched, used 20. Only Robbins Bros. and the 101 Ranch Show presented street parades among the rail shows.

Overland circuses, virtually all of them now one hundred percent motorized, included Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, St. Leon Bros., Seils-Sterling, Hunt's Wheeler & Sautelle, Schell Bros., Lewis Bros., Barnett Bros., Gentry Bros. (owned by Sam B. Dill, later changed name to Robbins); Russell Bros., Walter L. Main, Sam Dock, Fisher Bros., Snyder Bros., Original Gentry Dog & Pony, Orton Bros., Olinger Bros., Henry Bros., Todd Bros., and Escalante Bros. Most of the large overland shows continued to present the daily street parade.

The movement of the Sparks train from Sarasota to its opening stand in Chester, Pa. was unusual. The Sparks cars were attached and made part of the Ringling-Barnum canvas train (so called third section) which was enroute from Sarasota to that show's initial canvas stand in Brooklyn, N.Y. scheduled May 11-16. According to the *Billboard*, the joint train made its first feed and water stop at Waycross, Ga., May 2, the following day. The Sparks cars were de-

Sparks billing stand, Newport, R. I., June 9, 1931. Truck in foreground was used to

transport the crew while making its rounds billing the city. Photo by John Cutler.

Sparks billing stand, Newport, R.I., June 9, 1931. Photo by John Cutler.





Rosina Nelson, "Queen of the Air," on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1931. Bill Elbirn Collection.

tached at Chester while the remainder of the train moved on to Brooklyn. Presumably the Sparks advertising car had moved northward earlier. It can be observed in the photo showing the Sparks loaded flats, which was taken at the Sarasota quarters shortly before the train moved out, that the lead Sparks car at the right of the photo is attached to a string of loaded Ringling-Barnum flats.

The following short item appeared in the May 16, 1931 *Billboard* and told of an incident which occurred during the train movement from Sarasota to Chester and Brooklyn. It read as follows.

"Franz Woska, wild-animal trainer with Sparks Circus, recently fell from the show train thru a trestle into the Manatee River in South Georgia. He was found in middle of channel clinging to a log. His injuries were painful, but not serious."

No further details were ever given re Franz's plight. Maybe the report was true, but if so, the location was incorrect. The Manatee River is not in South Georgia but in Florida. In fact, the railroad from Sarasota crosses it just a few miles up the line from town, so if poor ole Franz did indeed fall into the Manatee he didn't have much of a ride before hitting the water. In any event Franz must have recovered quickly, caught another train, as he went on as scheduled during the opening performance in Chester.

The May 16, 1931 *Billboard* also covered the beginning of the Sparks season in an article, headed, "SPARKS HAS GOOD OPENING. Wild Animal Acts Among Features—Mechanical Loud Speaker Instead of Band.

"Philadelphia, May 9—Sparks Circus opened in Chester today to an excellent matinee and night business. Show is given under a 140-foot top, with three 40's, and everything looked spick and span. New idea in music is given—a large mechanical loud speaker, mounted on a wagon, is used to play the opening concert and all acts. It is cued very nicely to each act, and while the real circus band effect is lost, still the effect is

not bad. How it will eventually work out, later developments will tell. First performance with the instrument went off very well. Announcements also are made thru the instrument, altho not all of them, as George Connors makes concert announcements.

"Ira Watts is manager; Jack Lynch, assistant manager; Judge Kelly, legal adjuster; Harry Mack, press agent, and Allan Hauser, equestrian director.

"Main feature of show is three very good trained wild animal acts, introduced by LaVerne McClain and Franz Woska, consisting of leopard, lion and tiger acts.

"Pat Valdo, representing Ringling interests, was there to see that everything went off good for opening. There is a number of cages, eight elephants and other animals. (Note: Although the reviewer listed only eight elephants there were positively nine.)

"Wild West Show is given for concert and wrestling feature is part of it.

"Side Show is under management of George Connors, and consists of following attractions: Chester Cass, giant; Hamiltons, Scotch bagpipers; Suzanne, midget; Mlle. Montrose, torture box; Carl J. Thorson, comedy juggler; Dolores Cavanaugh, snakes; Princess Zelda Johnson, mindreading; Mlle. DuBerrie, Australian Bird Circus, and Billy DuBerrie, magic, Punch, and inside.

The Program

"No. 1—Tournament. No. 2—Riding dogs and monkeys, Carlos Carreon, and A. Hauser; wire-walking dogs and monkeys, Star Harold. No. 3—clowns. No. 4—Chariot racing dogs, Carlos and Hauser. No. 5—Leopards, LaVerne McClain. No. 6—Three Judges and Spaulding Trio, comedy acrobats; No. 7—Dogs, Misses Lynch and Brahame, and lions, Franz Woska. No. 8—clowns frolic. No. 9—Leaping greyhounds. No. 10—Ladders, Misses Foster, Hill, Hauser, Thompson, Lynch, Smylette, Brahame, Davis, Mack, Polidor, and Guillaume. No. 11—Tigers, Franz Woska. No. 12—Clowns, high-diving dogs and monks. No. 13—Liberty horses, Carreon and Hauser. No. 14—Miss Rosina, wire act. No. 15—Elephants, LaVerne McClain, Daisy Guillaume, and Evelyn Thompson. No. 16—Guice riding act. No. 17—Head-balancing, trapeze, Viola Hauser; high wire, Billetti Troupe. No. 18—Clowns. No. 19—Nelson Family (eight), acrobatic act. No. 20—High-school horses, Misses McClain, Carreon, Williams, Hill, Foster, Bonhomme, Smylette, Polidor, Thompson, Lynch, and Hauser, and Messers. Carreon, Saunders and Foster. No. 21—Clowns crazy number. No. 22—Aerial Walters, comedy bars. No. 33—English steeplechase."

Other key personnel on the show included Frank J. Frink, general agent; Dixie Engle, contracting agent; Doc Walker, supt. privileges-concessions; Spot Griffin, boss hostler; Bert Bennett,



Wild animal trainer, Franz Woska, with ten day old tiger cub on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1931. Bill Elbirn Collection.

steward, supt. commissary dept.; Java Kain, chief electrician; Walkter McClain, supt. elephants; Franz Woska, supt. menagerie; Harry Mack, announcer; Buck Reger, supt. advertising banners; Fred Crouthers, supt. advertising car no. 2 (motorized); Bill (Christy) Moore, in charge of reserve seat ticket wagon; Hubert N. Sicks, road treasurer; Herbert H. Sicks, road secretary. (Note: the Sicks were twin brothers.)

The show had 5x8½ rotogravure type Magazine and Daily Review (Program) which was distributed free of charge. The American Circus Corporation had begun the use of this type of program on its units in the mid 1920's, and the practice was continued by John Ringling after he bought their shows. The Sparks 1931 program featured a lady riding sidesaddle on a horse and doing a layback and a clown's head. A photo of the program's front cover is printed here. It was the first program in the author's circus collection and was acquired when he caught the show during the 1931 season. (More about that later.) The program has 24 pages and includes a listing of the performance, 10 photos of Sparks acts and other associated circus subjects, and 7 full pages and several half pages of national advertising. Since the *Billboard's* review of the opening performance was unusually brief the Sparks 1931 program as listed the magazine and daily review is printed here in full:

SPARKS CIRCUS

A Supreme Achievement in Clean Amusement
Season 1931

Display No. 1
INAUGURAL PROCESSIONAL DISPLAY.
A COLORFUL PRELUDE TO THIS YEAR'S
CIRCUS PROGRAM

Display No. 2		
Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
Sable collie dogs riding		White collie dogs riding
Shetland ponies.		Welsh ponies.
Presented by		Presented by
C. CARREON		A. HAUSER

Display No. 3
Dogs and monkeys on the tight wire in amusing antics under the direction of STAR HAROLD

Display No. 4		
Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
Chariot racing dogs, white collies with monkey drivers.		Ponies, dogs and monkeys in an amusing chariot racing novelty.
MR. CARLOS		MR. ALLAN

Display No. 5
PERFORMING LEOPARDS, presented by their trainer, MISS LAVERNE

Display No. 6		
Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
THE THREE JUDGES	THE SPAULDING TRIO	
Acrobats in a series of laughable and lively antics.		A slapstick presentation by this ridiculous troupe of comedy acrobats.

Display No. 7		
Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
An amusing offering from Dogland, presented by MISS LYNCH	A sensational performance wherein FRANZ WOSKA displays his perfect control over ferocious forest-bred lions of the African jungle.	Trained dogs in cute capers, introduced by MISS BONHOMME

Display No. 8
KING MOMUS and his Merry Jesters in "THE CLOWNS' FROLIC"

Display No. 9
SPIRITED GROUP OF UNRIVALLED LEAPING GREYHOUNDS, featuring the High and Broad Jumpers, LINDBERGH and ECKENER

Display No. 10		
A FANTASY IN MIDAIR, A COTERIE OF LADY GYMNASTS ON SWINGING LADDERS		
Miss Foster	Miss Thompson	Miss Logan
Miss Hoyt	Miss Arthur	Miss Bonhomme
Miss Williams	Miss Lynch	Miss Davis
Miss Hauser	Miss Smiletta	Miss Mack

Display No. 11
Splendid group of jungle-bred Royal Bengal Tigers subjugated and trained to perfection's peak. Presented by Europe's foremost wild animal trainer, FRANZ WOSKA

Display No. 12
ON THE HIPPODROME TRACK
A novel presentation introducing CLOWNS and a mixed group of Accomplished High-Diving Dogs and Monkeys

Display No. 13		
Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
Sparks' company of incomparable liberty horses of unbelievable intelligence, put through their matchless paces by CARLOS CARREON		Sparks' beautiful high-spirited horses in amazing maneuvers and groupings. Animals that exercise thought and judgement. ALLAN HAUSER

Display No. 14
THE GRACEFUL DANCING QUEEN OF THE WIRE, MILLE ROSINA NELSON

Display No. 15
A VERITABLE MOUNTAIN OF ELEPHANTS PERFORMING IN SEPARATE AND ASSEMBLED GROUPS

Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
Presented by LAVERNE McCLAIN	Presented by RUBY HOYT	Presented by EVELYN THOMPSON

The world's fastest and best trained elephants, dancing and doing stunts at the command of their



The Riding Guices on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1931. Bill Elbirt Collection.

directors, under the personal supervision of their trainer, WALTER McCLAIN

Display No. 16
THE RIDING GUICES
A bareback riding act introducing hilarious comedy as well as skill and daring, featuring MR. WALTER GUICE, premier comedy equestrian.

Display No. 17		
Ring 1	Arena	Ring 3
Head balancing extraordinary on the swinging trapeze by VIOLA HAUSER		Sensational and hazardous high-wire exploits by the BILLETTI TROUPE

Display No. 18
Convulsing Convention of Comedy Cut-Ups

Display No. 19
The entire arena is here given over to the only act of its kind in the world, the incomparable Risley acrobats—
THE FAMOUS NELSON FAMILY

Herbert and Stanley, clowns, on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1931. Bill Elbirt Collection.



consisting of father, mother, son and daughters. Not only a featured act in America, but in Australia and all European countries as well.

Display No. 20		
SPARKS' CHAMPION BLUE RIBBON HIGH SCHOOL HORSES		
Ridden by		
Miss McClain	Miss Foster	Miss Lynch
Miss Carreon	Miss Bonhomme	Miss Hauser
Miss Hoyt	Miss Smiletta	Mr. Carreon
Miss Williams	Miss Thompson	Mr. Saunders

Display No. 21
The Clowns in New Capers. Their Only Mission is to Amuse You

Display No. 22
Remarkable feats aloft by agile and fearless performers on the aerial bars including daring comedians of the air.
THE AERIAL WALTERS

Display No. 23
ENGLISH STEEPLECHASE, introducing the world's champion, HIGH, BROAD and LIBERTY JUMPING HORSES, featuring Miss Etta Carreon, internationally famous rider.

Don't fail to see the Real Wild West and Rodeo which takes place in the main tent immediately after the circus performance is over. A wonderful Wild West performance. A great gathering of champion cowboys and cowgirls in cyclonic sports of the western plains, featuring Carlos Carreon, America's foremost exponent of trick and fancy roping; Kim Foster, lightning trick roper and rider; Jack Wolfe, champion trick rider and fancy roper of the Northwest; James Saunders, trick rider; Colorado Johnson, the versatile cowboy; Miss Etta Carreon, trick rider; Alice Foster, trick rider and roper; George Wolfe, trick rider and roper; and fifteen other cowboys and cowgirls.

A REAL RODEO

THE END

The appearance of the Sparks show on the lot was good despite its use of old canvas. All tents had been used in past seasons. In contrast to the canvas, all of the wagons had been newly painted and lettered as had the railroad cars. A visitor to the Sparks lot who was familiar with the previous 20 car show would be able to tell the circus was somewhat smaller but not drastically. The big top was the same as used in 1930, a 140 ft round with three 40's, but the menagerie tent was smaller and a couple of horse tents had been eliminated. The sideshow had newly painted banners, both ticket wagons had fresh paint and decorations, and consequently the midway presented a pleasing sight to the Sparks patron in 1931.

Following the opening in Chester, Pa. the show moved immediately into New Jersey for stands at Elizabeth, Red Bank, Bayonne, and Westfield, then returned to Pennsylvania for a single date at Bethlehem. The following day saw the show back in New Jersey at Dover to complete the first full week of the new season.

The second week brought more New Jersey dates at Morristown, Nutley, Bloomfield, Englewood, and Ridge-wood, then on May 23 the show moved over to Stapleton, on Staten Island, N.Y. to finish out the week. Two days were played in Stapleton then the show travelled to Long Island, N.Y. with initial

stand coming at South Ozone Park which was followed by Hempstead, Huntington, two days at Jamaica, then on to Jackson Heights for two additional days. Sparks stayed in this area for three more stands, Far Rockaway, Queens Village, and Port Chester, then it was farewell to the Empire State and the show moved on to New England. June 4 found the show in Connecticut at Meriden which was followed by New London and a date at Westerly, R.I., June 6, completed the fourth week of the season.

There was no news concerning the Sparks show, immediately following its opening, but the June 13, 1931 *Billboard* carried a very fine report on the show as it moved into the New York City area. The article is so complete it is printed here in its entirety. It was headed, "SPARKS PLAYING AROUND GOTHAM" and reads as follows:

"NEW YORK, June 6—Sparks Circus ushered in its third week out May 30 by invading Jackson Heights, L.I. for a two-day engagement. The *Billboard* reviewer caught the show Thursday afternoon at Jamaica, L.I., situated on a lot in heart of the community. Weather was July heat and turnout was just fair.

"Performing leopards were put thru their paces by LaVerne McClaine, one of the most versatile performers around the show. Franz Woska's work with seven lions was smooth and polished. Woska is in center ring, flanked by canine groups in amusing rope-jumping and parade thru hoops. Swinging ladder ballet is well timed and cued o.k. by mechanical loud speaker. It seems strange at first to hear music emanating from somewhere with traditional bandmen invisible, but as sequence progresses one gets accustomed to the 'canned' idea. There is a man spotted next to a calliope and using a pair of cymbals, however, so the whole isn't completely synchronized and cued with a variety of phonograph records. Woska comes on again four displays later with his Royal Bengal tigers. In addition to the familiar formations and perch groupings, he has the cats walking across poles and rolling on barrels. Allan Hauser's and Carlos Carreon's Liberty horses are nicely paced and well routined. Rosina Nelson, one of the Nelson family of Risley acrobats, was in fine fettle on the tight wire. She goes thru an intricate order of high jazz

steps, jumps over a table and executes a cartwheel somersault to a good sendoff. Pachyderms in groups of three occupy trio of rings, with Laverne McClaine, Ruby Hoyt, and Evelyn Thompson doing the gentle coaxing. Walter McClain is trainer of the bulls. The Riding Guices, equestrians, offer some knock-about comedy. Walter Guice concocts the comic items. Viola Hauser does neat head balancing on the swinging trap, finishing with the revolver on head. In same display is Billetti Troupe, dressed as sailors. They're on high wire with balancing poles. The Nelson Family in center ring is as ever the acme of acrobatic perfection. This celebrated Risley aggregation includes parents, son, and four lovely daughters. Rosina does doubling duty here, while Carmencita pronounces a fitting windup with a somersault stretch clear down the hipp track. High-school horses stunted in traditional manner, with Miss McClaine featured on a layback around track. Carreon comes on doing an inebriation characterization on the animal. Aerial Walters are on the bars. The girl holds the trap catch atop. Comics okeh. Walt Guice makes a big leap from center bar to trap, eluding one bar. High jumpers were in great shape at performance viewed, so was Liberty horse on unjockeyed leap.

"Ward Hallings, tattoo, has been added to side show, which George Conners manages. On the ticket boxes are Jack Cavanaugh and E. E. Jefferson. W. E. DeBerrie is inside lecturer."

The June 20, 1931 *Billboard* reported that since the opening Sparks had experienced very satisfactory business even in the rain and mud, only light business encountered being at Jamaica and Jackson Heights, which was due to heat and the fact that the beaches and Coney Island had just opened. The performance, under the able direction of Allan Hauser, moved smoothly and efficiently. Among features, honors seemed to be evenly divided among the Guices' riding and aerial bar acts, Franz Woska's tiger and lion acts, Billetti, high wire, Viola Hauser, head-balancing trapeze, Mlle. Rosina, wire act, Carreon's high-school horses and the

Sparks Circus wagons lined up at Sarasota, Fla. quarters following close of the 1931 season. Note wagons had not been unloaded. Joe Bradbury Collection.



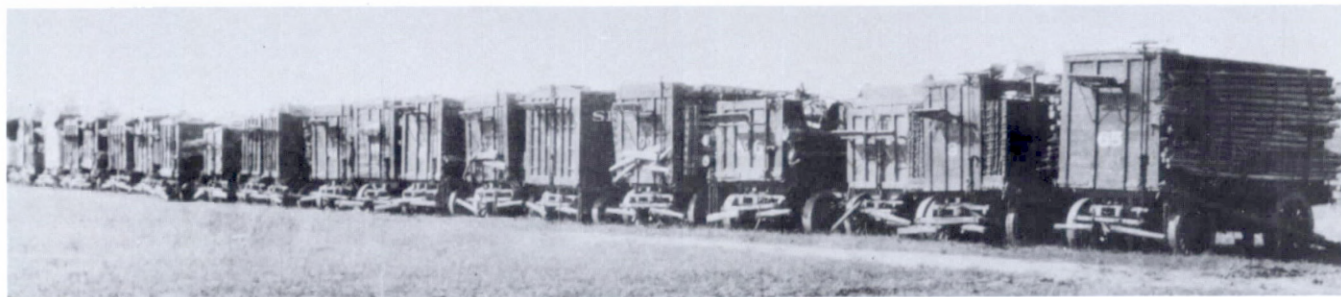
The Aerial Walters on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1931. Bill Elbirt Collection.

Nelson family. Other notes said that Polidor and Jacobs in their comedy prize fight were the latest addition to the show, coming to Sparks from the Ringling-Barnum show. The new music on the show was going over big and excites much favorable comment, show officials declare. Forty and 60 piece band records were used nearly exclusively. Charles Luckey now had charge of the canvas and same is going up and down in the usual Sparks show manner. A final item said that in Connecticut the Circus Fans Association members had been regular visitors and their co-operation had been greatly appreciated by management.

A few weeks later the *Billboard* announced that former boss canvasman, Ralph Noble left Sparks at Port Chester, N.Y. and later joined Robbins Bros. at New Britain, Conn. in the same capacity. Noble would be a prominent figure connected with the infamous "red lighting" incident on Robbins Bros. at Mobile, Ala. a few months later in which some of the show's personnel were thrown off the moving circus train causing death for one man and injuries to others.

So far into the season reports in the trade publications concerning Sparks' business said the take had been satisfactory. One such report came from J. F. Stuzzman who said he caught the Sparks outfit on May 15 at Bethlehem, Pa. during its first week and that the performance was good but drew only fair sized crowds.

The fifth week of the season saw Sparks getting well started on a tour of New England which consumed some





six weeks. Two dates were played in Rhode Island then the show went into Massachusetts for Fall River, Wareham, Brockton and Quincy. All of the sixth week was in the same state with stands scheduled at Lynn, Salem, Gloucester, Newburyport, Haverhill, and Lawrence.

The final date in Massachusetts was at Lowell, June 22 and the remainder of the seventh week was spent in New Hampshire with performances given in Concord, Franklin, Laconia, Rochester, and Portsmouth.

The July 4, 1931 *Billboard* advised that although Sparks had encountered plenty of rain, business had been satisfactory, this report coming from Harry Mack. When Sparks was in Lowell, Mass. Robbins Bros. was nearby and social calls between personnel of the two shows were in order. Quite a few Boston circus fans and newspapermen had been on the Sparks lot and were much interested in the new music and considered it very good.

Sparks found a pack of other circuses in New England. Evidently, the various general agents figured the territory was the best to be found and routed their shows into the area. Competing for the Yankee dollar were, in addition to the Sparks Circus, Walter L. Main, Wheeler & Sautelle, Charlie Sparks' Downie Bros., and even Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros., the latter having never before come this far east. Buchanan's move had paid off as his show coming across New York state had attracted some of the heaviest business done anywhere in the country by any show in this depression season. Competition was fast and furious between the various shows in many towns but after the advance boys had had their fun and the circuses set up on the lots, often times only a few miles apart, the show folks would enjoy friendly visits among

Sparks Circus on the lot, season of 1931. In foreground is the midway with sideshow bannerline and tent in center. Marquee and menagerie tent are at far right. Photo by Herbert Sicks.

themselves. One interesting aspect of the gang-up of circuses in New England was that Charles Sparks, owner of the motorized Downie Bros. Circus, was often in opposition to his former railroad show bearing his own name.

The July 11, 1931 *Billboard* had an interesting report. The article said that Sparks Circus was moving along on time, having uniformly satisfactory business and getting excellent notices on the music. Fred Buchanan, of Robbins Bros. was guest of Ira Watts at Lowell, Mass. and other points. Bill Newton, of the Walter L. Main Circus visited at Franklin and Charles Sparks was on hand at Rochester. Other notes said that legal adjuster, John Kelly, said that Laconia, N.H. has them all beat. Mayor Charles Carroll issued strict instructions that no tickets should be issued to anyone connected with the city and threatened to revoke the license should this order not be carried out. He even bought his own tickets. At Laconia, W. F. Tenny, head of station WKAV, gave an hour's talk on the circus that was very educational and interesting.

Sparks next moved into Maine for 16 consecutive stands. Dates were at Portland, Lewiston, Livermore Falls, Waterville, Bath, Rockland, Augusta, Dover-Foxcroft, Houston, Presque, Van Buren,

Sparks Circus on lot, season of 1931. From left to right are the sideshow bannerline, menagerie tent, marquee, and big top. Photos No. 21 and 22 form almost a complete lot panorama. Photo by Herbert Sicks.



Ft. Kent, Millinocket, Bangor, Ellsworth, and Calais. Very little appeared in the *Billboard* about the Sparks tour of the state, although the July 18, 1931 issue did state that the show broke in a new lot at Portland, June 29. Lawrence C. Brown advised that although handicapped by a soft lot the performance moved along smoothly and rapidly. There were big crowds at both shows. Another article in the same issue said the show would enter Canada at St. John, N.B. on July 17. The advance crew crossed the Canadian border at Calais, Maine, morning of July 3. Arthur Diggs was manager of the No. 1 car; Karl Knudson was handling press; and 18 others were on the car handling the various duties of billposters, lithographers, banner squarer, and bannermen.

The July 25 *Billboard* noted that Sparks has finished its Maine dates and is now in Canada. Business at Portland was very satisfactory. The show had considerable rain and wind which cut somewhat into receipts. Maine papers spoke very well of the new music on the show. In Fort Kent the show entertained Mrs. Jerome Harriman and mother. Sparks' general agent, F. J. Frink, was back on show at Portland and Eddie Jackson of the press staff saw the show at Waterville. A final item said that Judge John Kelly, legal adjuster, and Jack Lynch, assistant to manager Ira Watts were very much on the job.

While the show was in New England CHS member Bill Brinley got only a brief look at it so does not recall many details. He writes as follows: "Sparks played Meriden, Conn., June 4, 1931 and I begged my father to go by Hanover Park in that town to see some part of the show. So after work and supper, the family got into the Model T Ford and drove from Wallingford to Meriden. The only thing I remember was a Mack truck pulling the two cookhouse wagons up a grade onto the street to go to the freight yard, about two or two and a half miles away. The wagons were red with yellow undergear, and the tables and poles were blue."

The first Canadian stand was at St. John, N.B. and was followed by Moncton the next day which completed the tenth week of the season. The route then took the show up into territory which had been played by the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1930. A Sunday run of 116 miles followed Moncton as the show moved over the Canadian National Railway to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The run included a movement by the car ferry from Cape Tormentine across the Northumberland Strait to Borden on the island. An additional stand on Prince Edward Island came the following day at Summerside then the show returned to the mainland and moved into Nova Scotia for eleven dates, Amherst, Truro, Windsor, Kentville, Digby, Yarmouth,

Bridgewater, Halifax, North Sydney, Sydney, and New Glasgow.

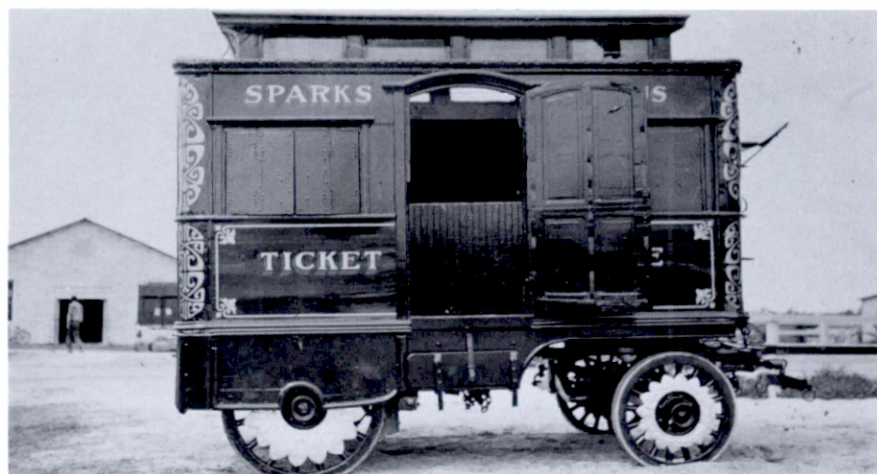
The Nova Scotia stands were completed on August 3 then the show took off on a regular overnight run of 248 miles to Newcastle, N.B. and finished the remainder of the thirteenth week with additional dates in New Brunswick at Campbellton, Bathurst, Fredericton, and Edmundston.

The show which had seen so much close opposition from other circuses in New England, most of them being of the motorized variety, now found itself free of competition. In those days Canadian laws governing the movement of motorized amusements from the states were so complex that none even tried to tour the Dominion. In fact it was well after World War II, the late 1940's, before motorized circuses based in the states began making Canadian tours.

The August 1 *Billboard* gave the first news of Sparks tour of Canada saying that the show, after playing to good business in Maine, was now in the provinces. The first stand, St. John, July 17, was capacity; and Moncton, the second town, was just about a sellout. Other notes in the article had it that Evelyn Skaggs was now working in the Billetti Troupe. This sensational act now consisted of two men and a girl. Press notices had been wonderful and papers mentioned that it was the best program ever offered by this show. The American Counsel, Mr. Pierce, at St. John, entertained Manager Watts and Judge John Kelly, legal adjuster, in that city. The new music used continued to get flattering notices, in fact, many of the towns said that they prefer it to the old circus band.

The August 8 *Billboard* reported that Sparks had successful days on Prince Edward Island at Charlottetown and Summerside. George Ross, circus veteran, left show after it crossed border at Calais, Maine. At Truro, N.S., Rosina Nelson fell from her wire and sustained a sprained ankle and bruises. She returned to the program a few days later. Daisy Polidor fell from her horse at Kentville, but gamely went to work at the night show. Harry Ruddy, 24 hour man was brushing up on his French before show reached country where it was needed. Curley Stewart, the show's other "minute man" said it was not necessary for him to take lessons as he is familiar with that language. Walter McClain's elephants, Franz Woska's animal group and other features were scoring. Final notes said that Bill (Christy) Moore was in the white ticket wagon (reserved seat) and Paul Conaway, former press agent of Sparks and circus fan Jones from Bridgeton, N.J. spent several days with the show.

When Sparks was at Moncton, N.B. the show's personnel followed the old circus tradition of paying tribute to deceased troupers who had lost their lives in various tragedies. A separate article



Newly painted Sparks general admission ticket wagon at Sarasota quarters shortly before start of the 1931 season. Photo by Herbert Sicks.

in the August 8, 1931 *Billboard* told the story with headlines, "SPARKS EMPLOYEES HONOR MEMORY OF BARNES TROUPERS." The story read as follows.

"MONCTON, N.B. Aug. 1 — Honoring memory of employees of Al G. Barnes Circus, who lost their lives in the wreck of that circus train at Canaan, July 20, last year, employees of Sparks Circus, which played here July 18, instructed a local florist to place a large floral wreath on graves of the two men interred in Elmwood Cemetery and to plant flowers on that of the victim buried in Shediac Road Cemetery.

"Graves of the dead employees are given perpetual care, the Barnes Circus having made arrangements for this after they secured the lots in the two cemeteries here."

While in Canada most runs were long

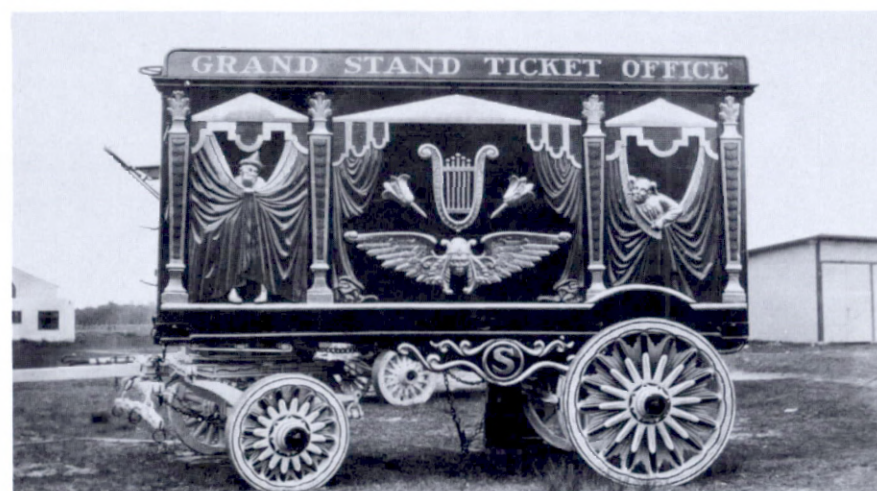
Sparks grandstand ticket wagon (Stage Curtain and Clowns tableau) at Sarasota quarters shortly before start of the 1931 season. The wagon was painted in the different color scheme, basically red (dark) as

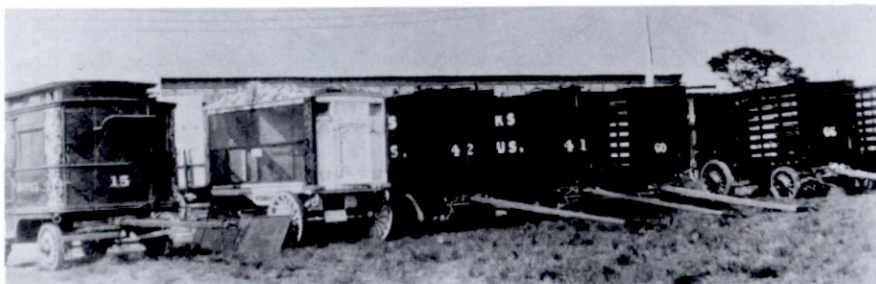
but excellent service was provided by the railroads. A Sunday run of 242 miles moved the show from Edmundston, N.B. to Quebec City, Quebec where performances were given Monday, August 10, to begin the fourteenth week of the season. The remainder of the week was spent in Quebec province with stands at Three Rivers, Joliette, St. Hyacinthe, Valleyfield, and St. John's.

Another Sunday run, this time a short move of only 43 miles, saw the Sparks train return to the states at St. Albans, Vt. where performances were given on Monday, August 17. Three additional Vermont stands followed, Montpelier, Burlington, and Bennington, then the show went into New York for dates at Troy and Saratoga Springs to complete the fifteenth week.

From various reports printed in the *Billboard* it would seem the public readily accepted the radical use of "canned music" on the Sparks Show, some even claiming they liked it better than the traditional live band. Much of this was attributed to the show's own press de-

compared to basically white (light) in 1930. The difference in color schemes is an excellent guide for identifying Sparks photos of these two seasons. Photo by Herbert Sicks.





Sparks wagons at Sarasota quarters shortly before start of the 1931 season. From left to right are No. 15, general

admission ticket wagon, a cage wagon, and baggage wagons no. 42, 41, 60, and 66. Photo by Herbert Sicks.

partment in an attempt to create the impression that "canned music" was as good as live, or even better. One national press report quoted John Ringling saying that for 1932 he was considering switching to canned music for all of his circuses with the exception of Ringling-Barnum. However, there appeared many letters to the editor in the *Billboard* from those who did not like the new fangled canned music. A couple printed in the Aug. 29, 1931 *Billboard* were in response to an earlier letter from a Frank Littlefield who had praised the new canned music.

One from a Charles Casler of Amsterdam, N.Y. read in part: "Maybe Littlefield is interested in the financial end of electrical transcription (canned music). I do not make my living at the music game. But I do not glory in seeing so many talented musicians turned loose on the labor market. If the managements of every other branch of business did as the electrical transcription circus did, then all shows in time will follow the 101 Ranch [which had just gone broke in Washington, D.C.]. Littlefield will have to admit we will not get out of this depression by curtailing too much on expenses. If Mrs. Littlefield being an ex-circus troupier, prefers electrical transcription, just when did she ever work with it? It was only installed this season for circus use. As to its being timed better, Littlefield, is all wrong again. There is no musical machine that will change tempo and time like a good band of musicians. In the first place the band follows the performer. And it's the same with them as it is with all other walks of life. Some days they will slow up and other times work faster."

The other letter was from a John A. Bunn, Irvington, N.J. It read: "In regard to Electrical Transcription by Frank Littlefield. Why does the gentleman insist on his story? Does he think the whole circus world thinks the same?"

"Charles Casler, of Amsterdam, N.Y. was right. He must be an ex-showman, where as Mr. Littlefield apparently is not, and I am not a musician out of employment. I always worked on baggage stock when I trouped. But us troupers would not troupe if we did not hear the band playing. On hard rainy nights,

mud over the hubs, getting the big top down, small wages etc, what keeps us trouping.

"Circus bands are so fascinating. The Sparks Show is very good if it had a band, but they play vocal numbers for riding acts. Downie Bros. played Morristown, N.J. and Nutley, N.J. and packed them in. Sparks Circus played the same towns with only fair business. Why? No parade, no band. Charles Sparks [owner of Downie Bros.] could keep the 101 Ranch out all summer and make money.

"Go over and look at this Downie Bros. outfit, from the advance to the back door. Paper all over. Big dates. Here are some of the towns Charlie Sparks is playing in the east, Camden, Elizabeth, Englewood, and Asbury Park, N.J. No depression on the Downie show."

A Paul Sullivan commented that he had seen the Sparks show back on June 23 at Concord, N.H. where it rained and business was only fair. The performance moved with speed and patrons spoke highly of it. Mr. Sullivan remarked that the mechanical music was not noticed after the show got underway.

A couple of short items appeared in

Newspaper advertisement for Sparks Circus stand at Athens, Georgia, Wednesday, September, 23, 1931. Author Joe Bradbury, then a 10 year old schoolboy, clipped this from the local newspaper. Joe Bradbury Collection.

ATHENS WED. SEPT. 23

ONLY RAILROAD SHOW COMING THIS YEAR
Hillcrest Street Opposite Old Circus Grounds

INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS
SPARKS CIRCUS

COUNTLESS NEW NOVELTIES AND FEATURES INCLUDING:
THE ORIGINAL NELSON FAMILY
AERIAL WALTERS BILLETTE TROUPE
GUICE EQUESTRIANS
FRANZ WOSKA World greatest tamer of wild animals

TWO COMPLETE SHOWS DAILY AT
2 and 8 P.M.
DOORS OPEN ONE HOUR IN ADVANCE

the *Billboard* concerning Sparks' first week back in the states. John D. Love wrote that he saw Sparks at Bennington, Vt., August 20 and said it had a good performance. The show's horses were in fine condition. Attendance was about 65 percent of capacity at both the afternoon and night shows.

Continuing in New York the show played Cooperstown, Monday, Aug. 24 and Oneonta the following day, then moving on southward it went into Pennsylvania for Carbondale, Reading, Phoenixville, and West Chester to finish off the sixteenth week.

The September 5, 1931 *Billboard* said that Cooperstown, N.Y., was favored by the Sparks Circus making its first appearance in this section in many years. The audience greatly enjoyed the show. Attendance was good at both performances. The article noted the show covered more than 4,000 miles in Canada, and that it would move south swiftly after stands in Pennsylvania. Later reports in the *Billboard* said that circus fan George Barlow caught Sparks at Oneonta, N.Y., August 25, where the show had a fair matinee and at night the tent was about two-thirds filled. The audiences seemed well pleased with the performance. Barlow noted the show moved on 15 cars and that the big top was the same that had been used the previous season.

Thomas F. O'Connell Jr. advertising representative of Redpath Chautauquas said that Sparks was the first railroad show to play Cooperstown, N.Y. in 20 years and played to good sized audiences. Local papers gave enthusiastic afterthoughts. O'Connell said that everything was in good shape, animals well kept, and performance up to a high standard.

A report also in the September 5 *Billboard* came from Townsend Walsh, a former circus press agent, who had a thoroughly delightful visit to the Sparks show at Troy, N.Y., August 21. Sparks press agent Harry Mack welcomed Mr. Walsh and presented him with keys of the tented city. Writing of his visit, Walsh had this to say: "Had a chat with Prof. Delveco, who dates back to early riverboat shows on the Mississippi and its tributaries. Reminiscenced with John C. Kelly about the Forepaugh season of 1880 when every day meant two turn-aways. Met the Nelson family, the most finished risley artists now before the public. The new generation of Nelsons, under watchful eye of Papa Nelson, worthily maintains high prestige of this famous family. Enjoyed splendid riding and aerial work of Walter Guice; perfect animal exhibits of Herr Franz Woska; brilliant wire dancing of Rosina Nelson and high-wire exploits of newly organized Billette troupe. But where, oh where, are the clowns? Truly a genuine 'joey' seems today extinct.

"After the performance Manager Ira M. Watts and wife invited us to an

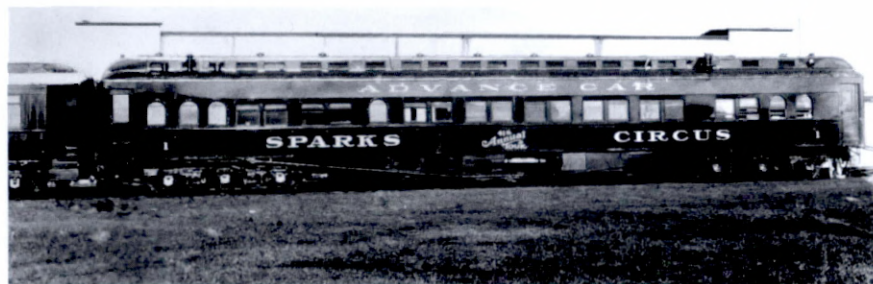
excellent repast in cookhouse. Mr. and Mrs. Earl Chapin May, who had motored over to Troy from their home in Sharon, Conn. joined party, and we, one and all, agreed that a more charming host and hostess than Mr. and Mrs. Watts never existed in circusdom. We all remained on the lot after night show until the last tumbrel had been wheeled away to the circus train."

Leaving Pennsylvania the Sparks show played a single date in Delaware at Dover, then moved into Maryland for stands at Cambridge, Salisbury, Crisfield, and Pocomoke. September 5, final day of the seventeenth week found Sparks at Cape Charles, Va. Another ferry ride came next as the show floated over to Norfolk, Va. which was followed by other stands in the Old Dominion State at Portsmouth and Petersburg. On September 10 the show moved into North Carolina at Henderson. Other stands in the state were at Durham, Burlington, Reidsville, High Point, Salisbury (the Sparks former winter home), Statesville, Concord, and Gastonia, which was the last day of the nineteenth week.

The twentieth week of the season was one of rapid travel which saw the Sparks show playing in three states. The week began, Sept. 21 at Spartanburg, S.C., next came Georgia dates at Gainesville, Athens, Macon, and Columbus, and on Saturday, Sept. 26, the show was in Montgomery, Alabama.

Very little appeared in the *Billboard* concerning the show once it got into the South. Competition was fast and furious again and there were a number of other circuses in North Carolina including two, both named Robbins. Fred Buchanan's 15 car Robbins Bros. was there, as was Sam B. Dill's motorized show, also titled Robbins. These two, along with Sparks, and several other motorized shows were all fighting for the tobacco farmer's dollar. Sparks had close competition with Buchanan's Robbins Bros. show in Macon, Ga. where Robbins came in earlier to be followed by Sparks on September 24. An article in the Sept. 26 *Billboard* said that when Robbins played Macon the show was visited by a number of former troupers and circus fans. It said that Sparks opposition paper went up two days before the Robbins date, and both shows used special ads in newspapers.

In the meantime, as fall approached the great depression began taking its toll of circuses as it had the previous season. On August 4 the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show folded in Washington, D.C. Poor business had forced the show to close. The next day St. Leon Bros. closed in Williamsport, Pa., another victim of hard times at the ticket wagon. The most spectacular blow-up was that of Robbins Bros. which closed suddenly September 12 after playing Mobile, Ala. The infamous



Sparks Circus advertising car No. 1 at Sarasota quarters shortly before start of the 1931 season. Photo by Herbert Sicks.

red-lighting of some of the show's employees occurred as the train was enroute to its winterquarters at Lancaster, Mo. after leaving Mobile. Not only the events which happened stunned the circus world but also the fact that Robbins did not make a full season. That show had experienced some of the best business of all during part of its season and even in recent weeks its take had been good. In any event, both non Ringling owned rail shows, 101 Ranch Wild West, and Robbins Bros. were now finished and would not appear again. That left John Ringling in complete control of the rail circus world. But his hold on it was indeed shaky. Ringling-Barnum closed its 1931 season on September 14 in Atlanta, Ga., its earliest ever. Business had been poor for much of the season and the King felt it should stay out no longer. The remainder of the Ringling railers, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Al G. Barnes, and Sparks all continued for several more weeks.

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 1931, Sparks played Athens, Ga. where I was living at the time, a 10 year old schoolboy in the 5th grade. As always circus day was the best day of the entire year for me and although I do have some distinct memories of catching the Sparks show that day there are many other details of the circus which unfortunately were never pressed into my memory very much, or at least I have forgotten them. Those of us who have been circus fans since our earliest recollections, and that includes most of us, can recall some incident

Sparks Circus wagons parked at Sarasota quarters in 1938. At extreme right is the air calliope wagon and next to it the

connected with even the first shows we ever saw but there are other things which we should have recalled but unfortunately we don't. Our memory can work in strange ways at times. I can remember far more about Sells-Floto in 1930 when I was a year younger than I can about Sparks in 1931. That is because I think Sells-Floto was on Saturday, a non school day in September, and I was in the rail yards with my older brother and other neighborhood boys. We saw both sections of the train come in and unload, and of course Sells-Floto had Tom Mix himself, of which boys my age wouldn't have swapped one Tom for a dozen Herbert Hoovers, then president of the United States. I can name several other incidences where I can recall far more about one show than another even though the better remembered circus was seen at an earlier age. Sometimes our circus memories can be triggered to other events of our early lives. For example, I am positive I saw the revival of the Gentry Bros. Dog and Pony Show, about a 15 truck motorized show, operated by Henry B. Gentry (1931-34) on two separate occasions. The first time was Tuesday, April 26, 1932 and I recall that event as if it were yesterday. On the Friday following, my grandfather died and both events are firmly placed in my mind. On the other hand I have only vague memories of seeing Gentry the second time even though it was on a Saturday and I was on the lot long before the first truck came in. But until only a few years ago I did not even know the correct year. Was it in the Spring of 1933 or was it 1934? Finally, a fellow circus fan friend, Bob Brisendine, while researching the

Stage Curtain and Clowns tableau which was used as the grandstand ticket wagon in 1931. Joe Bradbury Collection.





Display of historic circus wagons at Sarasota, Fla. quarters about 1937. From left to right are former Sparks wagons, Dancing Girls tableau, Dolphin tableau, and a cage with corner statues. Joe Bradbury Collection.

Athens, Ga. newspaper file, found the date, it was Saturday, Nov. 4, 1933. Actually, it was only a month after I had seen Downie Bros., which I remember fully and completely, the street parade, performance, menagerie, lot, the whole works. Why the day, a month later, on the Gentry show isn't clear to me. I don't know. But so much for all of this, back to Sparks 1931.

The show arrived in the Southern Railway yards from Gainesville, Georgia where it had played the day before. Although the Gainesville Midland Railroad ran directly from Gainesville to Athens the show elected to remain on the Southern where it had been for the last ten stands and go the longer distance by moving up the main line to Lula, Georgia and then down the branch to Athens in order to avoid the time consuming and sometimes troublesome interchange. However, leaving Athens, the show was interchanged over to the Central of Georgia and departed on that line's branch to Macon where performances were scheduled the next day.

Although I didn't have a camera at that early age (it would not be until I saw Downie Bros. in 1936 that I'd take my first circus pictures) I clipped from the newspaper any and everything about Sparks coming to Athens, which remains in my collection to this date. Also I got my first circus program ever. (Why I didn't get one of the same type free programs when I saw John Robinson in 1928 and 1929 I don't know.)

Sparks used a new lot in Athens for the first time in 1931 located on Hillcrest Avenue which actually was only about 300 yards from the former King Avenue lot but by the existing road net would have been about a half of a mile nearer to town. Why the old King Avenue lot was not used again was never explained. Possibly, it was because when Sells-Floto was there in 1930

heavy rains made a quagmire out of the grounds and the show's heavy baggage wagons tore it to pieces with ruts over a foot in depth. These ruts could still be easily seen some 10-12 years later. But anyway, the Hillcrest lot wasn't as large and had somewhat of a slant to it, also it had two levels and shows often parked baggage wagons or trucks on the lower level, although I never saw any tents set up there. Sparks' 140 ft. with three 40's big top was the largest ever set up on the Hillcrest lot. Gentry Bros. played the lot in 1932 and again in 1933 using a small circa 80 ft. round with two 40's. Downie was also there in 1933 with a 120 ft. round with three 40's. When Hagenbeck-Wallace came to town in 1934 it had to find a larger lot located out on Oglethorpe Avenue, some 4-5 miles from the nearest rail siding necessitating a very long haul. Downie Bros. returned to Athens in 1935 and set up on the Hillcrest lot and was the last circus ever to use it. Cole Bros. played later in the fall of 1935 but had to go to the larger Oglethorpe Avenue lot as did Tom Mix and Downie Bros. in 1936.

Since the Sparks 1931 date was on a school day, my making a return visit to the rail yards was out of the question but I did get some early morning glimpses of the show. On the way to school several of us loitered on Hill Street for a while to watch the Sparks wagons go by enroute to the lot. I recall very vividly the sight and sound of the

Sparks Circus wagons parked at Sarasota, Fla. quarters about 1933. Note Dancing Girls tableau at far left. Joe Bradbury Collection.



two Mack trucks hauling two baggage wagons each down Hill Street. In fact that same day I sketched one of the Macks pulling wagons No. 7 and 9, one of them being a light plant with the folding side panels down. Some years later when I finally saw photos of the Mack and wagons I realized that I had made the sketch remarkably accurate even to positioning and type of the lettering and numbering.

When I got to the lot later in the afternoon I did indeed note that the show appeared smaller than when I had last seen it in 1928. We knew there would be no street parade but still I missed the beautiful tableau wagons parked about the lot such as had been seen in 1928. (Being let out of school early the day Sparks played in 1928 and standing on Prince Avenue and watching that show's beautiful street parade pass by remains to this day one of my most cherished circus memories.) Now, I definitely remember seeing the tableau type ticket wagon in 1931, which of course would be the Stage Curtain and Clowns but that is the only parade type wagon I recall seeing. Since it was customary for the canvas tarps to remain on the other tableau wagons it is entirely possible I saw some but didn't recognize what they were. Although I must have walked completely around the lot—and the backyard was not closed off—several times the only wagons I remember were red painted baggage vehicles with their steel tired wheels. Several of these were parked down on the lower level. For many years I believed the mechanical music works was housed in the air calliope wagon but photos indicate it was in the little Clown and Jockey tableau. Now what bugs me more than anything, I really cannot remember anything about the so called canned music, the type music played, how it sounded etc. Of course at that early age I didn't have the knowledge and taste for circus music that I later acquired. Unfortunately, I do remember so well the next attempt at canned circus music by a major circus—that of Ringling-Barnum in 1942 after the band went out on strike early in the season. That canned music was awful. It stunk in my opinion.

Finally, as mentioned before, I got my first circus program during the visit to Sparks, and at such a young and innocent age I couldn't understand why photos would be in the program of anything other than what was actually on the show. In the program is a truly great and rare photo of the Two Jesters steam calliope obviously taken on Sells-Floto in the period 1922-25. Photos showing the Two Jesters on that show are virtually non-existent for some unknown reason. Well, if Sparks had a steam calliope as the program pictured, where was it and why didn't it play for the evening lot concert. How well I remembered being at my cousin's home on

King Avenue, virtually across from the lot where Sparks was set-up in 1928, and at dusk comes the piercing sounds of the steam calliope as it gives forth with the customary lot concert a short time before the midway opening. But in 1931 came dusk, then darkness, and still no sounds of the steam calliope, a truly disappointing and puzzling experience for a 10 year old boy. The next day my beloved Sparks Circus was gone, never to return. I couldn't understand why, and also, why didn't John Robinson come back? The Atlanta papers which we got as well as the local often had something about Charlie Sparks and his Downie Bros. Circus in winterquarters at Macon. Downie played Atlanta in 1932 and made an Athens visit for the first time in 1933, then returned in both 1935 and 1936. Had the Sparks railroad circus gone to trucks and become Downie Bros.? Such were the many questions that were in the mind of this young circus fan. Fortunately, just about the time Sparks played my town in 1931 the October issue of the *National Geographic Magazine* arrived in our school library containing Bev Kelley's superb article on the circus, the best overall circus article ever written, in my opinion. Kelley's piece did indeed open my eyes to the world of the circus somewhat, but at long last when on the Downie Bros. lot in 1936 I found a discarded copy of the *Billboard* and my eyes were then fully opened and many of the confusing puzzles that had baffled me for so long became clearer. It was still some months before I learned that the local newsstand sold the *Billboard* and in those depression years if I had the 15 cents I bought a copy but too often I didn't. If not, I proceeded to hole up in the magazine stacks and read away until chased from the scene. I learned from the pages of the *Billboard* there were circus fan organizations and that people like Bob Good and P. M. McClintock even sold circus photos. And from then on I was on my way. Really, I didn't want to take this much time from the Sparks article to go into all of this, but since so many of us, especially those of the author's generation, experienced pretty much the same during their early years, I felt it might be fun to remember. One final thing, the Sparks 1931 printed program has been read and re-read so many times, even to this day I could almost recite it from memory. And the Two Jesters steam calliope pictured in the program which couldn't be found on the Sparks show proceeds to turn up the very next time I saw and heard a steam calliope—in the great 48 car Hagenbeck-Wallace street parade in 1934. The Two Jesters problem wasn't finally solved for many a moon.

Resuming the Sparks route at Montgomery, Alabama, September 26, the show played one additional stand in Alabama, Tuscaloosa, then moved into



Sparks Circus wagons parked at the Sarasota quarters in 1938. First wagon from right carried the show's dogs. Joe Bradbury Collection.

Mississippi at Columbus, September 29 for twelve dates in the state. The string of stands was broken for a run into Tennessee to play Dyersburg and Jackson but the Mississippi tour was resumed the following day at Clarksdale. While in Mississippi Sparks had an auspice tie-in with the American Legion for all of its dates. The Oct. 3 *Billboard* told the story headed "SPARKS UNDER THE LEGION. Series of 12 engagements to be played in Mississippi auspices of '40 and 8'." The article said that Sparks has been booked under auspices of the Jackson 40 and 8 American Legion service organization for a series of 12 engagements in Mississippi, beginning September 29 and concluding October 13. The Jackson voiture of the 40 and 8 served as central booking agency for the engagements, making the necessary local arrangements thru Legion posts in towns in which the circus played. Legion dates were at Columbus, Corinth, Clarksburg, Grenada, Kosciusko, Greenville, Vicksburg, Yazoo City, Laurel, Hattiesburg and Meridian, actually only 11 dates.

After the Mississippi tour the show moved into Alabama to play Mobile, October 14, then entered Florida at Pensacola and remained in the Sunshine State for the remaining three and a half weeks of the season.

Sparks Circus wagons parked at Sarasota quarters in 1938. Front row of wagons from right are the air calliope, Stage Curtain and Clowns tableau (grand-

The October 24 *Billboard* said that Sparks had recently made the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi with business being good in spots. No closing date as yet had been set. Quite a few folks from Downie Bros. visited at Spartanburg, South Carolina and some of Sparks' troupers recently visited the Downie show. Ray Nord was still in charge of the musical department and was offering a well-selected and enjoyable program. Ernest Haag and others of the Mighty Haag Show visited at Corinth, Mississippi, also Mr. and Mrs. Howard King. There was much handshaking at Macon, Georgia, old stamping grounds and former winterquarters of the Sparks show. Paul M. Conway, former press agent on the show, now on the *Macon News*, was much in evidence. Sparks spent Sunday, October 11, in Hattiesburg, Miss. and 40 people of the show drove to New Orleans to see Sells-Floto. After close of Hagenbeck-Wallace, Mrs. Charles Luckey joined Sparks to finish the season with her husband. Chesty, clown, joined when the Ringling-Barnum show closed.

From Pensacola the Sparks train moved to Marianna, and on Saturday, October 17 the show was in Tallahassee to complete the 23rd week of the season. The 24th week began at Jacksonville with additional dates coming at Gainesville, Ocala, Orlando, Sanford, and Palatka. The 25th week saw Sparks at St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Ft.

stand ticket wagon), cage, Horse and Jockey tableau, and 5 more cages. Another cage is on row behind the air calliope. Joe Bradbury Collection.



Pierce, West Palm Beach, and two days in Miami, Oct. 30-31.

Sparks was now the last of the Ringling owned shows still on the road. The October 24 *Billboard* had an interesting article on the circus season rapidly coming to a close. The piece noted in headlines that some shows were still going, all of them motorized except Sparks. In addition to Sparks, those circuses still on the road included Sam B. Dill's Robbins, Mighty Haag, Russell Bros., Schell Bros., Original Gentry Bros., Mack Hale Bros., and Downie Bros., although Downie ended its season (28 weeks) at Moultrie, Georgia, Oct. 31, and return to winterquarters at Macon, Georgia with total season mileage of 8,459. Among recent closings were Al G. Barnes at San Pedro, California, October 11; Barnett Bros., Gaffney, South Carolina, October 7; Hagenbeck-Wallace, Hinton, West Virginia, October 8; Sells-Floto, Cairo, Illinois, October 16; Wheeler & Sautelle, Martinsville, Virginia, October 15; Conroy Bros., Kansas City, Kansas, October 3; Fisher Bros., Marengo, Michigan, October 10; Seils-Sterling, Carrollton, Kentucky, October 17; and Hunt Bros., Catonsville, Maryland, October 17. Other closings in addition to others already mentioned were Lewis Bros., Benton Harbor, Michigan, Sept. 5, and Walter L. Main, Kingsport, Tennessee, Sept. 14. The article concluded by stating that some of the shows had fairly successful seasons while others just about broke even. A number of the outfits found business spotty. There were not many so called big days, but Robbins Bros. and Downie Bros. played several stands in the East where it was necessary to give three performances.

Sparks' final week of the season, the 26th, began Nov. 2 at Winter Haven, which was followed by St. Petersburg, Tampa, Lakeland, and Fort Myers, with the last stand coming at Sarasota on November 7. Then the show headed into the Ringling-Barnum quarters in the same city. Total mileage for the season was 11,682.

The November 14, 1931 *Billboard* gave the last report on the Sparks season. It said that Sparks' tour of Florida had been the most successful of any state this season. After conclusion of the season Mr. and Mrs. Ira Watts were to remain in Sarasota but most of the personnel would scatter throughout the country. Many acts continued to work in the off-season, the Billetti Troupe would play fairs, as well as the Riding Guices and Franz Woska's animals, the latter two scheduled for the South Florida fair. Viola Hauser would go to Syracuse, New York to play an indoor circus date directed by Fred Bradna.

Several months later it was announced that Sparks Circus would not go out in 1932. When this decision was made is not known to the author, however, possibly it was in the plans at the



Carved figure from the Sparks Circus Dancing Girls tableau which is now in the Smithsonian Institution. Maurice Allaire Collection.

time the show played its final stand in Sarasota because the baggage wagons were not unloaded immediately and remained parked together in a field at quarters for some time. When they were finally unloaded is not known to the author. Photos indicate the wagons had been parked still fully loaded for a considerable period of time.

The 1931 season had been a rough one for John Ringling and his circus empire. How the individual shows fared is not known, except that tradition has long held that Ringling-Barnum was perhaps the hardest hit, also Sells-Floto's take was way down. By contrast Hagenbeck-Wallace, under new management of Jess Adkins, according to tradition, did much better and was on the way up, so much so that for 1932 the show was enlarged 5 cars, to a total of 35, while Sells-Floto was reduced 5 cars, from 35 down to 30. History would later record that John Ringling had made his last tour in 1931. He was ill at the start of the 1932 season and was not able to travel. A double blow hit him, as in July 1932 he was forced to forfeit on his loan payment to the bank-

ers who had financed his purchase of the American Circus Corporation in September 1929 and thus lose control of his shows. The bankers put in their man, Sam Gumpertz, to run the show.

Only four Ringling shows went out in 1932: Ringling-Barnum on 90 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, 35, Sells-Floto 30 and Al G. Barnes 30, a total of 185 cars, or 15 fewer than in 1931 when Sparks was also on the road.

Why the 15 car Sparks show was selected to be shelved was never fully explained, especially since it made the longest tour of any of the Ringling units. Many people who had direct knowledge of the situation have maintained it had a fair season, certainly not a heavy loser. However, the Ringling management knew that it would take a considerable amount of money to provide badly needed new tentage for the show to go out and also with the depression continuing to worsen it was felt it would be prudent to further retrench and go with only four circuses in 1932.

Since 1931 was the final season for the Sparks Circus whose lineage took it back directly to its beginnings under John H. and Charles Sparks we shall attempt to tell the story of the disposition of the show's physical equipment, certainly a sad one concerning the beautiful parade wagons.

As many as possible of the Sparks key personnel were absorbed into the Ringling organization. Ira M. Watts was employed for a number of years mainly assisting at the Peru quarters. When Jess Adkins resigned in the fall of 1934 Watts was placed in complete charge at Peru. The Sicks twins, Herbert and Hubert both went to work in the Ringling-Barnum ticket wagons. Although all nine of the Sparks elephants were merged with the Ringling-Barnum herd Walter McClain was sent to the Al G. Barnes Circus and became superintendent of elephants for that show in 1933.

The April 30, 1932 *Billboard* said that 21 cat type animals had arrived at the Peru quarters from Sarasota. These were working animals which had appeared in the Sparks steel arena in 1931, lions and tigers of Franz Woska's act, and leopards and pumas from that of Laverne McClain. All of these cats had been trained to perform and the lions and tigers were worked into Clyde Beatty's act with Hagenbeck-Wallace and the leopards and pumas into the mixed number of Jules Jacet on the same show. Franz Woska was retained and became menagerie superintendent of Ringling-Barnum. He held this position for a number of years. Likewise, Walter McClain remained with Al G. Barnes through that show's final season of 1938, then in 1939 became elephant boss of the Ringling-Barnum herd, a job he retained until he was killed in an accident on the show in Jacksonville, Florida, November 25, 1942.

What disposition was made of the

show's various properties, tentage, seats, props etc. after they were finally unloaded from the wagons is not known to the author. Possibly there was a sale for some to other shows, but for the wagons there was absolutely no market for these during the depression years of the early 1930's. Surplus wagons were also in abundance at the Peru quarters, and the former Robbins Bros. wagons at the Hall Farm in Lancaster, Missouri and Christy Bros. wagons in South Houston, Texas had no buyers until the late fall of 1934.

In 1937 Ringling-Barnum general manager Sam Gumpertz was anxious to turn any and all former circus property, including show titles, which were not being used into cash by way of sale or lease. The May 8, 1937 *Billboard* said that Gumpertz sold to the World of Mirth Shows (large railroad carnival) 3 flat cars and 2 sleepers formerly used by Sparks which had been sitting idle on the Sarasota quarters siding since 1931. About the same time, Gumpertz agreed to lease to Charles Sparks the titles of the John Robinson and Sparks circuses when he was on the verge of converting his motorized Downie Bros. Circus to rails for 1938. Sparks later changed his mind and didn't consummate the deal, electing to continue his Downie show on trucks. Gumpertz then made a deal to lease the John Robinson and Sparks titles to Howard Y. Bary plus as much surplus equipment as might be left at the Peru quarters. A short time earlier Gumpertz had leased the Hagenbeck-Wallace title, equipment and animals for a 35 car show to Edward Arlington and J. Frank Hatch to go on the road for the 1937 season. Very soon after the show went out Arlington and Hatch sold it to Bary so it was no longer necessary for the latter to get the Robinson and Sparks titles. The Sparks title continued to rest on the shelf until it was leased to James Edgar who used it on a motorized show in 1946 and ten car railroad circus in 1947.

In 1936 there were a number of improvements made to the Sarasota quarters. The *Billboard* in announcing that the quarters improvements were completed in late December 1936 noted there was now a display of old circus wagons which included the former Ringling United States bandwagon, the Sparks Dancing Girls and Dolphin tab-



Biller posting large Sparks Circus daub for stand at Spartanburg, South Carolina, September 21, 1931. Pfening Archives.

leaux, a Sparks cage with corner statues, and two chariots. Photos show the display to be very nicely arranged with the wheels of the vehicles set on a concrete base and a guard rail placed by a walkway from which visitors could easily see the wagons. Why the display was discontinued and when that occurred is not known to the author but was probably in the period 1939-41. The two Sparks tableau wagons and cage were probably destroyed at same time as the baggage wagons, while the United States bandwagon was relegated to the wagon graveyard where it finally fell apart from neglect and only a few carvings saved to go to the Circus Hall of Fame.

When the destruction of the Sparks wagons actually happened is not known

Wagon graveyard at Sarasota quarters about 1938. Wagons from Ringling-Barnum are pictured but most are from Sparks. The Sparks general admission ticket wagon is seventh from the left. Note the Horse and Jockey tableau third from right with several Sparks cages next to it. Joe Bradbury Collection.

to the author but it may have been in 1941 at about same time as the great wagon burnings at Peru. At Peru a number of fans were on hand to photograph that carnage but nary a soul was in Sarasota with camera in hand to record the tragic end of the Sparks wagons. The destruction of the wagons was complete, in fact there is no circus in modern memory which passed away with so few artifacts left in remembrance. The single wagon of Sparks origin at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo is there only by a quirk of circumstances. It had been sold to Floyd and Howard King for their Walter L. Main Circus in 1925 and eventually ended up in Baraboo after going through the line of King owned rail shows. Had it remained with Sparks it too would have been put to the torch.

The last dated photos showing Sparks wagons in Sarasota are 1938. When Bob Good, Bob Sams, and Troy Scruggs visited the quarters in the 1944-46 period to take pictures all of the Sparks wagons were gone, baggage, tableau, cages, and calliopes.

Four carvings from the Dancing Girls tableau were somehow saved and are now in the Smithsonian collection according to Maurice Allaire. Both the dancing girls and carved lions are represented in the collection. There are no known carvings remaining from the air or steam calliopes, the Dolphin, Stage Curtain, or Horse and Jockey tableau wagons.

When I made my first visit to Sarasota in February 1949 I searched the wagon graveyard, in fact virtually the entire quarters, for physical signs of the Sparks Circus. There was little or nothing to be found. An old boiler near the cookhouse building was pointed out to me as having come from the Sparks steam calliope. At the time I was also told that the whistles from the Sparks steamer were stored in the loft of the menagerie building. Another whistle from the Sparks steam calliope had been rigged up in one of the shops where it could be sounded. Mel Miller later got this whistle, the last known survivor from the Sparks steamer, for the Ringling Circus Museum.

In May 1960 I made a final visit to the wreckage of the old Sarasota quarters. With me was Mel Miller, then curator of the Ringling Circus Museum. All of the buildings had been wrecked except





parts of the large train shed still remained but it too was being rapidly dismantled. Several men were welding on the new train and wagons which the Ringling-Barnum show soon put into use. Mel and I talked at length with Lloyd M. Morgan Sr. who was in charge of the quarters work. In our conversation I asked him about the disposition of the Sparks steam calliope whistles which were once stored in the loft of the now wrecked menagerie building. He said, yes, the Sparks steam calliope whistles were there at one time, along with those from another steamer, the latter no doubt having come from Bridgeport when Ringling-Barnum moved to Sarasota in the fall of 1927, but that someone had "fingered" all of the whistles. He didn't know who had made off with them but said he did have a suspect or two. In any event the whereabouts of the missing steamer

Sparks wagons in the Sarasota quarters "graveyard." At left is a cage with corner statues and at right, the Dolphin tableau. Date is uncertain but the photo was probably one of the last ever taken of the Sparks wagons prior to their destruction in period 1938-1940. Pfening Archives.

whistles were unknown. Possibly they will turn up some day, also possibly someone may have gotten the carvings off other Sparks tableau wagons before they were destroyed. The carved figures from the steam calliope especially would have made nice additions to any collection, public or private.

EPILOGUE

With the completion of the 1931 Sparks story *Bandwagon* has made a remarkable accomplishment. The entire history of the Sparks Circus from beginning to end, including the two seasons of the James Edgar version in

1946 and 1947, has now been printed in its pages. Three authors did the actual writing but many people helped the cause by furnishing information and illustrations. Especially helpful with the final installment were Bill Elbirn, Maurice Allaire, Bill Brinley, and Fred Pfening Jr. Thanks also go to Herbert Sicks for the fine group of photos used. It took some twenty years to finish the Sparks project. The James Edgar Sparks show came first. Bill Elbirn covered the 1946 season in the November-December 1964 issue and Joe Bradbury the 1947 edition, in the January-February, March-April, and September-October 1970 issues. Gordon Carver did the most work in telling the Sparks story from its beginning under John H. and Charles Sparks on through the 1928 season, the final year it was owned by the Sparks family. Carver's project took 8 installments and was printed in the January-February, May-June, and November-December 1977 issues; the January-February, May-June, September-October 1978 issues, and the January-February and May-June 1979 issues. Joe Bradbury authored the 1929 season article, the only year the show was owned and operated by the American Circus Corporation which was printed in the March-April 1984 issue. He also had a summary and photo supplement of the 1930 season in the September-October 1984 issue. (Reason for the special shortened version was explained in that article.) The final year of the two seasons the Sparks show was owned and operated by John Ringling, 1930 and 1931, printed here completes the history of the show.



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The Flamboyant Showman and His Six Title Circus

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.



PART THREE DAN RICE CIRCUS 1937

The Dan Rice Circus winter unit equipment pulled into the Jackson, Tennessee, winter quarters a day or so following the closing on January 23, 1937.

During the first thirteen weeks of the 1936 season the Rice Bros. Circus used left over route cards from the 1934 Howard King version. King's name was blocked out and the cards were imprinted "Ray Marsh Brydon Operative Manager for Receivership." It is unknown just who had title to the equipment, or just what the receivership reference meant. After the title change to Dan Rice in midseason of 1936 a new route card heading was used, just listing Ray Marsh Brydon, proprietor. This same new style card was used again in 1937, with the year changed.

Artwork very similar to that used on the new route cards appeared on a new style letterhead used late in the 1936 season. This letterhead was lettered with "84th annual tour." In late February of 1937 the letterhead was reprinted, updating it to "85th annual tour."

The first 1937 *Billboard* reference to the Rice show was in the March 13 issue. This news story included the important announcement that Ira Watts had been named as general manager of the Dan Rice Circus. The opening date had been set for April 3, 1937. Lee Hinckley, who had directed the band on the winter unit was contracted to return for the 1937 summer season. Little Bill Henry was to arrive on March 20, and was again to handle the big show tickets. His wife Esther was to work the elephants and ride manage. Owen Webb had been making trips to the Cole Bros.

quarters in Rochester picking up material and equipment for the Rice show. The advance under Ben Holmes had been completed and had 10 billers, a contracting agent, press agent and four trucks. Owner Brydon had ordered special billing paper and new newspaper ad designs. Danny McPride was to return as principal clown.

A letter in our files, dated March 7, 1937, written to Ted LaVelda by Brydon reads as follows: "Everything is going nicely here in quarters, as most all of the equipment has been repainted and lettered. Will have a much better show this year than last, although you did not see the Big Show last year, as you came on after we had cut same down for the winter show."

"Had a letter from Del Graham in New Orleans saying that he would be here in plenty of time for the opening. The Grahams and the Aerial Lakes will

The office wagon was relettered for the 1937 tour with a design that is typical of Brydon.



A number of the Rice show trucks are shown during the New York state tour in 1937.

be here again, in fact quite an amount of the same acts we had last year will be with us again, and we are also adding quite a number of new and novel attractions.

"We are depending on you to be with us this year, as we feel you will be satisfied."

Ted LaVelda's memories of 1937 went like this. "About a week before opening, we went to Jackson, Tennessee. The three bulls came in. I am sure they were the same three elephants from Cole Bros. that had been there in 1936. Brydon gave the bull act the title of the Ad-Zac troupe."

"There was about a twelve piece band led by Lee Hinckley. Montana Earl Brombolt was the equestrian director. Al Bailey and wife were there with western acts for the concert. One of the acts was Brock's Bar Troupe, and I believe that Nick Cravat was with Brock. At one



Central Show Print, Mason City, Iowa, designed this letterhead for the Dan Rice show early in 1937. The title is outlined in

gold on a blue background. The design is highlighted in red. All illustrations from Pfening Archives.

time Cravat and his partner Burt Lancaster had worked a perch pole and bar act on the Kay Bros. Circus.

"The show opened in Jackson on April 3 with a dress rehearsal the night before that was open to the public for a fee. Brydon came to me during the night performance and asked me to come by the office to sign contracts. He told me, 'Ted, this month of April is always tough, so I made out the contract for a few dollars less than agreed.' I said to let me study it, which I did and decided to stay in Jackson and make other contacts. The next day, Brydon called and said he would pay the agreed salary, but I had sent some wires and received offers. Brydon then asked, 'You're not coming?' I answered, no. Then Brydon came back with, 'I hope you are always running around the country in an old car.' I said, 'at least it will be paid for.'

"The Sunday after the opening, the show was tied up for money owed to merchants in Jackson, but Brydon was a capable fixer and somehow got the show sprung.

"Brydon would run an ad in the *Billboard* about every week. He had the

theory that it was cheaper to run the ads than it was to pay people."

Actually it was probably foxy old Howard King who sprung the show, as he was the legal advisor with Rice in 1937. Although we have found no direct reference, various bits of information suggest that he may have come up with some money to get the show out of quarters.

Brydon had not signed a contract with the International Alliance of Billposters. This union ran an ad in the *Billboard* of March 3 advising its members not to work for Dan Rice, Downie Bros., Seils-Sterling, Chase and Son, Schell Bros., Lee Bros., or Seal Bros. circuses. The Tom Mix, Russell Bros. and Barnett Bros. were the only truck shows that had signed an agreement.

Brydon may not have come up with the money for the merchants of Jackson, Tennessee, but he dug into his pocket for the cash to take a half page ego advertisement in the April 10 *Billboard*. This ad listed the staff for the

Ira Watts, general manager of the Rice show, is pictured on the right in front of the office wagon.



1937 season. It included: Ira Watts, general manager; T. Ross Harrison, general agent; Ben Holmes, contracting agent; Harry L. Hamilton, contracting press agent; Walter Lawrence, car manager; W. D. Storey, auditor; Fred Miller, treasurer; Dr. Joseph M. Hefferan, general press representative; Howard King, department of public relations; Ray Cramer, side show manager; Danny McPride, producing clown; Earl Brombolt, equestrian director; Lee Hinckley, musical director; Ed Monroe, general superintendent; Owen "Slim" Webb, master of transportation; W. R. "Little" Henry, superintendent of privileges; Del Graham, superintendent of ring stock.

The ad also thanked the following suppliers, Central Show Print, Baker-Lockwood, Erie Lithographing Co., United States Tent and Awning, O'Henry Tent and Awning, Standard Chevrolet Co., Enquirer Job Printing Co., and the Cracker Jack Co.

It didn't take Brydon long to start running his "want ads." The first one appeared in the April 10 *Billboard*. This one was looking for billers and working men. Two weeks later he was looking for cookhouse waiters and a cook, as well as property men and seat butchers.

The Rice show moved into Kentucky on April 9 at Hopkinsville and remained in that state until May 1. Rice was in Hazard, Kentucky, on April 21 and the Walter L. Main Circus played that city on April 23. The Main show was in Whitesburg on April 22 and Rice showed there on April 28. Jean Belasco, press agent joined the show on April 29, after handling winter dates for Frank Wirth.

The show reported a good day at Evarts, Kentucky on April 29, where the schools were dismissed at noon. Dan Rice played three dates in Virginia, and then moved into West Virginia, at War, where the day was lost due to flooding of the lot.

The May 15 *Billboard* announced that manager Watts had engaged Charles "Butch" Cohn as treasurer. Cohn had closed with the Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus in San Francisco a few days before. Watts and Cohn had worked together on various shows operated by the American Circus Corporation in the 1920s.

The Rice show was in Welsh, West Virginia, on May 10, and gave three performances. It was the first circus in Welsh since 1929.

Brydon was at it again with one of his famous ads in the May 22 *Billboard*. Along with his wants he stated, "We are proud of our cook house and our sleeping accommodations are the best. Pay off positively every Sunday with money. Our biggest battle is overcoming slanderous propaganda that we stall pay days. This is merely idle dribble of our 'friends' the majority of whom were never connected with OLD DAN."

A news story appeared in the May 29

Billboard. Dated Montgomery, West Virginia, it stated business had been excellent during the first eight weeks of the tour. A blowdown had been narrowly averted at Pocahontas on May 12, with only damage being done to the side show top.

The running time for the performance was now one hour and forty-five minutes. The program was listed as follows:

No. 1 Opening tournament titled Old Mexico.

No. 2 Major Moulan working four small lions.

No. 3 Reardon's riding monks.

No. 4 Swinging ladders, Mary Miller, Helen Duffy, Esther Henry, Margaret Ford, Harriet Proctor.

No. 5 Clowns, Danny McPride, Jimmy Thomas, R. E. Barclay, Lew Walters, Dave Fultz, Earl Stimson, Tom Nash, Will Clark, Charles Tettleton, Mel Krug.

No. 6 Neil's Liberty Horses.

No. 7 Acrobatic display, Dell Trio, McMahon and Loy, Knapp Family.

No. 8 Perch ensemble, Blocks, Lake Duo, Lamonts.

No. 9 Clowns.

No. 10 Gentry ponies on revolving tables.

No. 11 Thirty three dogs.

No. 12 Clown baseball game.

No. 13 Mary Miller on bounding wire.

No. 14 Monkey races.

No. 15 Double traps, Brocks, Lake Family, Marlow Twins.

No. 16 Jargo, the giraffe and clowns.

No. 17 Iron jaw, Mary Miller, Helen Duffy, Bertie Heron.

No. 18 Leaping greyhounds.

No. 19 Danny McPride and his clown dogs.

No. 20 Suato Japanese Troupe.

No. 21 Arthur Morrison Quartet, comedy bicycle act.

No. 22 The Brocks, White Family (Lakes), Tantazar, acrobatic display.

No. 23 Andy Colleno, Hollywood chimp and the Grahams.

No. 24 Clown number.

The big top was probably an 80 foot round top with a forty and two thirty foot middles.

No. 25 Ad-Zacs, three performing elephants.

No. 26 Cloud swing, Mary Miller, Esther Henry, Helen Duffy.

No. 27 Clown firecracker bit.

No. 28 Bucking mules.

No. 29 Clown walk around.

No. 30 Gentry Horses.

No. 31 The Brocks, comedy bar act.

No. 32 Casting Carletons.

No. 33 Mary Miller, aerial gymnast.

No. 34 Six Casting Canellos.

If all of the acts listed actually appeared in the performance, it was a much stronger show than Brydon had offered during the 1936 summer season. With acts coming and going all season long the performance changed quite a bit throughout the season.

During the first month of the season the side show had sixteen banners out front, according to the *Billboard*. The wild animal cages were placed in the side show top. There was no mention about the elephants also being in the side show tent.

Ray Cramer, side show manager, presented a strong line up of acts that included the following: The Dixie Dandy Minstrels, with Jelly Roll Rogers as comedian and playing sax, Roland Thompson, guitar; John Johnson, cornet; Arthur Edmundson, drums; Will Price, tuba; Louis Page, trombone; Al Johnson, soloist; the Rayon Trio, dancers; Lillian Lorraine, Phoebe Mobeling, Alta LaMarr, Jenny Kline and Daisy Green. These dancers along with the band gave an impressive program using twelve blacks.

Others included the Swiss Bell Ringers and radio entertainers, Tom, Dick, and Harry; Lew Doromorton, glass blower; Johnny and Willie Carpenter, pygmies; Little Lord Leo, midget (also mail man and *Billboard* representative); Elizabeth Webb, sword box; Martha Raye, mentalist; Cuban Mack, swords and juggling; Chief Miller, impalement; Marquita Mack, big snake; Mickey Kelley, torture act and Allan Harris, iron tongue. The side show blowoff dancing girls were Elizabeth Webb, Ruby Moore, Mickey Kelley,

Marion Gain, Marge Ray, and Maude Montague.

Dora Dell sent some information to the "Dressing Room Gossip" department of the June 5 *Billboard*. It included the following: "The Nickname Club of the Dan Rice Circus has been the cause of everyone loosing his given name, resulting in such cognomens as, Dynamic Ray, Front Door Sam, Gypsy Lee, Deep-Sea Red, Kokomo, Angel Child, Jelly Roll, Poker Face, Cactus Nell, and Cloud Swing Vivian. The Ethiopian Swing Band and String orchestra entertained members of the Idle Hour Burial Association at a dance given after the show in Tanis, West Virginia. The cookhouse truck followed the Downie show arrows and lost nearly a day. A number of the Mighty Haag showfolks visited at Bluefield." These were fictitious references as the Downie show was in New England at the time and Bluefield was not listed on the Rice show route.

The Rice show moved into Ohio on June 15 at Barnesville, after playing thirty-four stands in West Virginia. The Jack Hoxie Circus, Haag Bros., Lewis Bros. and Walter L. Main were also in Ohio at the time, so the Rice show only made four stands in the Buckeye State. Barberton, without a circus for nearly ten years, was played on June 18 and produced a straw house at the night show.

Brydon took his circus on a 215 mile weekend run from Ravenna, Ohio to Salamanca, New York, for the June 21 date. The show arrived on time without a mishap in pouring rain. Rice played Wellsville, New York, on June 23 and the Tom Mix show played that city on the 26th.

Rice played Elmira on June 28 where Art "Doc" Miller visited the show. In a 1983 letter Miller told of his 1937 visit to the show. "I saw my old friend 'Big Bill' Erickson who seemed to be lot superintendent. I had met Bill back when he had the Al G. Barnes advance

The midway of the Rice show had plenty of flash, using a thirteen banner front on the side show.





The big show band played on the midway as part of a side show opening in Springfield, N.Y.

car, in fact he treated me OK for no reason at all and I never forgot the favor. Erickson's shoes looked like toss aways on some lot and his eye glasses had been broke so he had only one lens and one ear piece. The show needed long carriage bolts to go through the cleats on the stringers, so I took him to a wholesale house where I had a connection. They were exactly like he had hunted high and low for but never was able to locate. I also saw Howard King on the lot, and noted that he was still wearing high button shoes and they were about like the average kid would use. His feet were tiny. I presume Angel Face was there too, but as I didn't go through the front door I missed seeing that clever girl with the huge hand bag for H-O-ing front gate cheats. Erickson showed me their wall poles made of poplar. I still remember they were painted orange and were light as a feather. I guess they cut them around quarters in Tennessee, but they were straight as an arrow."

The newspaper ad used for the Elmira date listed the following acts that were not with the show: M'le Mezza Teti-eranza, operatic star; Ling Chung Fu Troupe; Col. H. B. Gentry; the Olympian Troupe; Ostrich Racers and Col. Tim Maloy and his Congress of Rough Riders.

Waverly, New York, was played on June 29 to capacity crowds on an airport lot. This *Billboard* reference also said the show was being given in an 80 foot round top with three 30s, and that Lee Hinckley was leading a fourteen piece band.

Frank "Kokomo" Anders, legal adjuster for the Jack Hoxie Circus which had closed recently in Ohio, Eddie Harris with a pit show, five billposters, four musicians and Mike Pyne, in charge of the Hoxie advance, all joined the Rice show in Fort Plain, New York, on July 7.

The July 24 issue of the *Billboard* announced that Rhoda Royal had joined the Rice show as equestrian director, having recently left the Tom Mix Circus. It also stated that all of the show

personnel were studying the art of makeup before the camera preparatory to the start of filming of the motion picture *My First Love, the Circus*, which was expected to start next week.

The Dan Rice show was in Gloversville, New York, on July 23. The Tom Mix and Hagenbeck-Wallace shows had both played that city earlier. Kingston was shown on July 28 and reported overflow crowds, being the first show in this season. Press agent Jean Belasco made a tieup with 30 local stores for the Kingston date.

The show moved into Connecticut on August 3 at Danbury. The *Billboard* reported that a number of circus fans from all parts of New England visited the show in Middletown. One of the fans visiting during the five day Connecticut tour was Wes Herwig, now a resident of Randolph Center, Vermont. In a 1970 letter Mr. Herwig shared these memories of the Dan Rice Circus: "My well-worn notebook recalls that I did catch the 1937 Dan Rice Circus on its swing through Connecticut late in the season (late for the New England territory, anyhow). As you may know Ray Marsh Brydon claimed relationship with Dan Rice, and all advance advertising featured Old Dan's bewhiskered portrait prominently.

"The show had a bang-up advance.

Mary Miller and clown Jimmie Thomas in the back yard of the Rice show in Springfield, N.Y., June 22, 1937.



The three "Ad-Zac" elephants on lease from the Cole show are shown in front of the bull semi-trailer.

They posted a lot of paper — most of it was loud yellow, black and red date sheet-stuff and had some strong newspaper advertising. Also, the press staff had some good story material, and the papers in Connecticut used it most liberally. So, from the advance end the show looked like something great.

"However, I note in my book that I was quite disappointed upon seeing the show itself, perhaps not so much from a quality point as from the fact that I had been anticipating a much larger show. To me, the prominent thing about Rice was the side show, which should have been expected, of course, as Ray was quite an operator in that regard. The canvas spread was all new for the year. The menagerie, according to my notes, was a small two-pole tent, housing the horses, about twelve in number. There were no caged animals in the menagerie tent, but the side show did feature an 'untamable lioness,' and the show's three small elephants were also featured in the side show as 'pygmy elephants.'

"The three small bulls were on lease from Cole Bros. and Dan Rice billed them as the 'Adzac herd of performing elephants,' playing on the Adkins and Terrell names.

"Undoubtedly you have a rundown on the performance so I will not detail that. It was the usual small three-ring show fare with Gentry's dogs and ponies, the Lakes, Mary Miller, a chimp act, Danny McPride and Jimmy Thomas in clown alley, and a large wild west contingent headed by Buck Sells. I did not set it down, but I seem to recall that Rhoda Royal was with the show as equestrian director. Tiger Tigerson, a professional wrestler, was with the show and took on all locals, as part of the concert.

"Lee Hinckley had the band, and in some towns they went downtown at noon and gave a concert. Also, the show carried a high pole free act on the midway, Capt. Varo, 'Demon of death.'


"Admission was 25 cents for kids with general admission tickets for adults at 35 cents. The day the show

This back yard view shows Neal Sells, wild west performer; Mary Miller, aerialist; Ray Marsh Brydon, owner; and Jimmie Thomas, clown.

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★ Specialist in the last Illinois of the "Bourgeois" - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

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★ Specialty act of Miscellaneous Opera House, N. Y. City - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

PETITE VIVIAN WHITE
★ High School Girl, 15 years old, 100 lbs. and 100 lbs. - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

ANDY CALINO, THE GREAT
★ The champion with the fastest finish 1000 Yards - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

DANNY McPRIDE
★ White hair and 100 lbs. and 100 lbs. - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

SUI TANAKA - THE KILLER
★ Japanese acrobats from the "Bourgeois" - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

THE OLYMPIAN TROUPE
★ A group of beautiful French acrobats from the "Bourgeois" - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

ADAZ-EC HEAD OF ELEPHANTS
★ Professional Performance of Elephant - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

OSTRICH RACES
★ With great interest - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

STRAWLER TIGER TOXICOM
★ Specialty act of Miscellaneous Opera House, N. Y. City - *San Francisco* - *San Francisco*

This newspaper ad was used by the Rice show for the Elmira, N.Y. stand on June 28, 1937.

men and promised a long pleasant season in the South.

The show moved south from Connecticut in five jumps to Virginia for three dates and then moved into North Carolina, at Reidsville on August 16.

The Dan Rice Circus played back and forth in North and South Carolina until October 2. Harry Baugh, of Durham, North Carolina, sent a note to the *Billboard* advising the Dan Rice had played his town on August 18 and had a good crowd at the matinee and strawed them at night. Downie Bros. was to play Durham on September 9. Wallace Bros. Circus was also in the Carolinas in late September and early October.

Business for the show in the South was off and on. George Lake says that in the fall his Mother often would loan the show money to pay the reader (lot license) and would then wait out at the front door to collect as soon as the money came in. The Lakes finally left not too long before it collapsed.

Indication that the show was not doing well was suggested by the fact that nothing appeared about it in the *Billboard* after early September.

The Dan Rice Circus was on a down-

hill course. The show blew the date in Hickory, North Carolina, on October 1. But a creditor caught up with the show there and attached two cages, which were quickly sold. Also due to weather the following day in Statesville was lost.

The show played Greenville, Tennessee, on October 4 and stayed in that state until closing on the 16th in Cookeville.

The October 16 issue of the *Billboard* carried an ad for BRAY BROS. CIRCUS. The ad stated, "Want to join now for a long fall and mid-winter tour of Oklahoma and Texas, circus acts of all description, family acts preferred, clowns etc. White musicians for big show band, colored musicians for side show minstrel. Novelty acts for side show. State salary when replying and keep in mind season of the year. Reply to Bray Bros. Circus—Lenoir City October 13, Harri-man 14, Crossville 15, Cookeville 16 and Murfreesboro 17, all Tennessee."

A newspaper ad appeared in the Murfreesboro paper advertising that Bray Bros. Circus would appear on October 18. This was a standard Dan Rice ad, with everything the same, except that the title had been changed.

Nothing further appeared in the press concerning the Dan Rice Circus. Indications are that Brydon had planned to cut the show down, as he had in the fall of 1936, and make a winter tour using the Bray (a takeoff of Brydon) title on a small show. Bray would have been the fifth title used by this circus.

News concerning the show did not come until after the first of the year, and then under a sixth title and supposedly a new owner. But the address of this show was a post office box number in Nashville. Just before the new show opened in the spring of 1938 there was reference that the quarters were in Cookeville, Tennessee.

It is rather clear that the Dan Rice Circus folded in Cookeville and that Bray Bros. probably never made it to Murfreesboro. Ray Marsh Brydon was not riding so high at the end of the 1937 season.

The dish washers are pictured next to the cookhouse truck with the dining top in background.





THE GREAT HARRIS BROS. 5 RING CIRCUS 1938

The last name used by the six title circus was the Great Harris Bros. 5 Ring World Toured Circus. The January 22, 1938 issue of the *Billboard* carried a news story with the headline, "DAN RICE SHOW CHANGES HANDS." The article announced that the Rice show, the past three seasons under the ownership and management of Ray Marsh Brydon, was sold in its entirety, title included, last October to W. R. "Little" Henry. It was at the completion of the 1937 season. Henry said, that the deal was closed with Brydon, who for the time being had retired from show business because of his health.

Henry advised that he would greatly enlarge the show, replacing and adding a lot of equipment, and open early in April under the title of the Great Harris Bros. World Toured Circus. Many of the old Dan Rice people were retained, including Ben Holmes, general agent; Jack Fenton and Pete Brovald, in charge of advance advertising; Dr. M. J. Hefferan, legal adjuster; W. D. Storey, in the office; Owen "Slim" Webb, master of transportation; Ray Cramer, side show manager and Sam Marretta, general superintendent.

The past three seasons Henry had been superintendent of tickets and manager of the candy stands with the Rice Circus. Prior to that he was with

The original Brydon bus-office wagon, was relettered with a third title for the 1938 Harris tour.

the American Circus Corporation for nearly ten years, and had also been with the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West.

During the twenty or so years that the author has been researching the Brydon shows the reason for transferring title of the show to Henry has not been determined. It is not actually known that Brydon did in fact transfer ownership. Brydon remained in the background and was not mentioned in any news stories about the Harris show during the winter and spring of 1938, but he surfaced in due time, finally listing himself as manager in the show want ads.

Things had become really rough during the final weeks of the 1937 season, and Brydon had many creditors closing in on him. Transferring title of the circus may have provided Brydon a way to avoid attachments from his creditors. It is very possible that Henry had advanced Brydon money late in the season and Henry had called in his marker. There is no question that Brydon had made some real money with the show during the 1937 season, but it had always been his habit to spend money as fast as he made it. He would often pay

Brydon went all out in repainting the entrance banner for the side show in 1938.



cash for some new equipment and let the bills on other things slide. He also spent a lot of money on his boy friends.

A large advertisement appeared in the same issue of the *Billboard* as the sale announcement. The Great Harris Bros. had many wants for the coming season. The ad read, "Wanted useful circus folks with motorized experience and with your own trailers. Family troupes doing several standard circus turns, girls for swinging ladder, cloud swing, spanish web, swing perch and iron jaw. Animal acts wanted included, ponies, dogs, monkey and horse acts. Like to hear from E. E. Coleman, Black's Bears, Holland Dockrill Troupe, Madam and Sir Victor Bedini, Del Graham and others with stock. [All of these acts had worked for Brydon during the prior three years.] Wrestler for concert, Tiger Tigerson reply. Circus musicians for big show, leader with library of music. All types of side show acts, dancing girls for annex, colored musicians for minstrel band. Privileges for sale.

"NOTICE: Because I bought the Dan Rice Circus I have a lot of circus property for sale. Canvas of various sizes, including an 80 by 140 foot round top with ten foot side wall. Have seats, small cage wagons, three 30 foot ring curbs, a 15 K. W. light plant and a number of double deck banners. Five hundred gallon water wagon and sprinkler mounted on a new Chevrolet tractor. Sleeper bus semi-trailer for 18 people, Kingham trailer pulled by Chevrolet tractor. The finest ticket wagon in motorized show business, fully equipped, mounted on a Studebaker chassis. Two hundred feet of big show reserve seat railing. A couple of ton and ton and a half Chevy panel trucks."

One person answering the Harris ad was Ted Milligan, a side show manager. A letter in our files on Harris stationery, dated February 23, 1938, was written by W. R. Henry to Milligan. It reads, "Dear Friend Milligan: Since receiving your last letter I have come up from Miami to quarters here in Cookeville, Tennessee.

"Slim Webb and Sam and a number of the folks you know are here and we are starting to work on the stuff.

"We have only 38 days until we open so you and the folks come on up here. Bring that mechanic with you and I will place him and take care of him. So come on, cook house is open and I will give you all a place to sleep. Write me when you are leaving and if mechanic has a car.

"Don't write for dough to come up on as it's costing me plenty to get this show together. Just make it the best way you can like every one else is doing. Let me hear from you at once. Regards, W. R. Henry"

Another letter in our files on Harris stationery was written from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, by Ben Holmes, the

This herald, printed by Erie Litho, is typical of Brydon's stretching his advertising. The illustration showing a turn of the century circus train suggests that the show is a large one. The price listed on the other side states "admission reduced to 25¢ for everybody, this date only."

general agent, to C. H. Droege, of Fredonia, New York. It reads, "In reply to your inquiry of January 19 in regards to posting for the Great Harris Bros. Circus, will state that I can place you salary Twenty Five, pay your own. If interested let me hear from you at once, as brigade starts March 19.

"I met you on the Allen Wild West show in 1934. You stepped off in Maryland. You should have stayed as we had a long season. I bought a new bill truck at Frederick, Maryland, same day you left.

"The season will be plenty long on this show also, show opens April 2 in Tennessee."

A news story appeared in the February 12 *Billboard*. This article stated that all new canvas would come from O'Henry Tent Company and delivery had been promised in ample time for the opening in April. Charles Driver was a recent visitor and stated that the six pole big top would be outstanding in its special design of red, white and blue. Side show and marquee would be in the same color scheme.

The article continued: "Deacon Albright reported from Evansville, Indiana that he had nearly completed layouts for his newspaper ads and art mats. Heralds will be mailed to rural routes. Dan White, past several seasons assistant to boss canvasman Bill Curtis on the Barnes show, will report to quarters later this month. He will be big top canvas boss."

The March 12 *Billboard* carried three small ads for the Harris show. One was for a wrestler. It read, "Wanted for concert. One who knows what it's all about, a man who will go out and dig up a townier who has some local following and color and not depend on using a boy off props. Must be able to put on a show, heat up the tip and blow them off without starting a clem and getting pistol whipped by the natives. Want a man who is tough in the ring, not around the office wagon or cook house. To a man that can qualify will guarantee him he won't have to act as a nursemaid to the boss' dog."


The second ad requested workingmen. It listed no show name, just to reply to Sam Marretta, Gen. Supt., Circus Quarters, Cookeville, Tenn.

The third ad was for, "Circus musicians on all instruments, for Harris Bros. Circus, A-1 calliope player who can cut it circus style wanted. Reply to Frank P. Meister, Arcade Station, Nashville, Tenn."

By late March a report from winter quarters advised that the new canvas

1355 **FIFTIETH TRIUMPHANT TOUR** 1938

GREAT HARRIS BROS.
WORLD TOURED SHOWS
AMERICA'S FINEST
BIG 5 RING CIRCUS



The Cleanest and Best Show Now Traveling
and the most healthful show ever exhibited at Popular Prices. Further show and all other shows and all other shows.

AIR CONDITIONED WATERPROOF TENTS - ELECTRIC LIGHTED
100 NEW FEATURES AND SENSATIONS 100

FOR OVER 50 YEARS
AMERICA'S MIGHTY
RAILROAD
CIRCUS


ACTUAL SCENE
UNLOADING
GIANT CIRCUS TRAINS

TO-DAY
THE GREAT HARRIS BROS.
WORLD TOURED
SUPER 5 RING CIRCUS

IS MATCHLESS IN ITS MODERN
MAGNITUDE SUPERB IN ALL ITS
SPECTACULAR SIGNIFICANCE
ROYAL AND REGAL IN ALL ITS
RESISTLESS REIGN OF GLAMOROUS
CONQUEST CONQUEST CONQUEST

A Priceless Pristine Presentation of Pompeian Pageantry

GREATEST AMUSEMENT VALUE SINCE THE DAWN OF CREATION!



A Fantastic Program of STARTLING CIRCUS SENSATIONS including Lady and Gentlemen Shows, Acrobatic Expert and Artistic Acrobats, Gymnasts and Acrobats and Never-Before-Seen Artistic Novelties.

General Admission Tickets and Reserved Numbered Seats Will be Sold Show Town-Show Day at Local Agency, or Admitted in City News papers, at Same Prices Charged on the Show Grounds. But Seats in Advance and

2 PERFORMANCES DAILY
RAIN OR SHINE, 2 AND 8 P. M.
DOORS OPEN ONE HOUR EARLIER-PLenty FREE PARKING SPACE

Fiftieth Great Golden Jubilee Tour

America's Largest, Grandest, Best Amusement Institute

HARRIS BROS.
♦ **GREAT 5 RING WORLD TOURED** ♦
CIRCUS

GREATEST COMPANY OF WORLD'S FUNNIEST CLOWNS

ADMISSION REDUCED TO
TO EVERYBODY 25¢ THIS DATE ONLY

SPECIAL SCHOOL CHILDREN'S MATINEE 15¢ GET TICKETS FROM TEACHERS

had been received from O'Henry, as well as new banners for the side show from the Neiman Studios. There were 14 double deck banners and with the double wide doorway the banner line would be 185 feet long.

Ted Milligan was in quarters and was getting the side show equipment in order. The cook house was under the

direction of Clarence Burr. Whitey Simmerson continued as big top boss canvasman. No mention was made of Dan White who was to have come over from the Barnes show to handle the big top.

Jack Barnes had been contracted to furnish the wild west concert and was to offer as a special attraction wrestler Jimmy Allen. Charles R. Hall was due with his mixed group of animals, ponies, horses, monkeys, bears, camels and elephant act.

Lee A. Sullivan, of the Big Eli Company, had been in quarters and picked up an order for three 24 foot semi-trailers, making nine of the Sullivan-Eli units on the show.

The Hatch Show Print had completed date and title bills. The Erie Lithographing Company had furnished pictorial paper and would print a herald for the show.

The call for all of those holding contracts for the Great Harris Bros. World Toured Shows appeared in the March 26 *Billboard*. Advance billers and working men were told to report to Albany, Kentucky. No opening date was listed, nor a location of the opening stand. Performers were instructed to acknowledge the call by mail to Nashville post office box. All of this was very strange, suggesting that the owners of the Harris show did not wish to advertise where they were or where the show would open.

A last minute change was made in the advance advertising supervision. Mike Payne the brigade agent, and his brother, who had been with the Rice show in 1937, reported to quarters, but for some unknown reason parted company with Henry. The show announced that R. M. Harvey and Clyde Mallory had been hired. Mallory, as advance car manager, left quarters with five trucks and twelve billers.

Cuban Mack and his wife Princess Marquitta were in quarters and would present impalement, big snake, sword swallowing, fire eating and juggling in the side show.

Another ad appeared wanting working men in all departments. They were told the show would be in Albany, Kentucky until Friday, April 1, then Monticello 3, Middleboro 4, and Pineville 5. This made it clear that the show opened in Albany on April 1. The equipment must have been moved from the winter storage location in Cookeville, Tennessee, a few days earlier.

In the same ad additional billers were told to contact Clyde Mallory in Corbin, Kentucky on April 29, London 30, Manchester 31 and Irvine on May 1. So these Bluegrass towns were also played early in the season.

Charles R. Hall did not last too long with the Harris show. He announced in Frankfort, Kentucky on April 16 that he was no longer with the show and would open his own circus later in the month in Indiana.



The April 23 *Billboard* carried an ad for the Harris show. The show wanted more musicians. Sam J. Golden, side show manager, wanted another real dancer. Mickey and Jack Kelly were wanted, Mickey to dance and Jack on sweets and ice machine. Also need a good novelty musical act. R. M. Harvey, privilege manager, wanted four minute photo or mug machine, frozen custard and cushion butcher. For the opposition brigade the show wanted a fast banner man and a main street lithographer, a man and wife, "who understands making paste and man to program." Benny the Bum and Bam, were asked to reply. The billers were to contact none other than Ray Marsh Brydon, opposition agent. Brydon could be reached in Bellaire, Ohio on April 19 and Martins Ferry on the 20th. All others were to contact the show in Charleston, West Virginia, no date given.

A letter in our files was written to Jess Adkins on the Robbins Bros. Circus, by Prof. W. H. Agnew, dated Huntington, West Virginia April 24, 1938, reads: "Dear Friend: We struggled northward, and last week joined Ray Marsh Brydon's Great Harris Bros. Circus. Brydon absent last four days, on account of pay day due. They pay in slot machine brass (tokens). At Hurricane, West Virginia they were struggling in deep mud a half mile off the highway. No Brydon around so we drove on here, we are on the same lot the Cole show played. This is a Police Circus and we close the 30 of April, so if you have changed your mind about us joining you on Robbins, you can let us know route ahead and we can catch you in a day or two. We heard that the Downie Bros. billposters tore down the Police Circus paper here and a suit

This Harris lot scene was taken by John Wyatt in Bellaire, Ohio on April 21, 1938.

will be slapped for \$300. They are going to wait until the circus gets on the lot May 2, then if they don't pay, and squawk, they will sue for \$1,000 and hold their entire equipment. There will be two circuses in Ironton, Ohio tomorrow on April 25, namely Great Harris and Haag Bros. Both are going to hop scotch around Ohio, so bring out your clippers in the form of a parade and teach them how to skid."

Agnew's first hand report after being with the Harris show leaves no doubt that Brydon still owned the circus and only had Bill Henry fronting for him.

The Lake family was back with Brydon on the Harris show in 1938 and Georgie Lake sheds some light on his experiences with the show that season. In his 1962 letter Lake wrote: "We were not at all surprised when we went to Cookeville, Tennessee in the spring and found Brydon in the ancestral mansion. Between our arrival and the opening I could write a book. Little Henry had the joints and his money got it going, but that was as usual. The big top was a 60 with five 20 foot middles. To get in a rigging you just sat on the bar in front of you near the ground. I did single traps with Floyd, web, swings, cloud swings, single perch and ladders, five acts in all. Floyd and Mother did their perch act. The Housers, Viola and Yoshida, did three head balancing acts and five perchs."

The cook house truck and dining top, with the marquee in background is shown in Bellaire, Ohio in 1938. John Wyatt photo.



"I broke some girls to do cloud swings. Fred Crandell was equestrian director. There were many others there, Brydon hired any and all at any salary, as he did not plan to pay anyone. C. S. Parks loaned him money that year also. With no money being paid I decided to become a cooch dancer [stripper] with Floyd selling tickets to make a living. Charlie Goss took the trucks back one at a time until about all that was left was the ticket wagon. Brydon gave Echo Yoshida the air calliope and then stole it back from him while he was asleep and sold it to a skating rink, nobody else got any money."

The Haag Bros. Circus provided opposition for Harris in a number of the Ohio towns. A news story in the April 30 *Billboard* advised that Harris Bros. planned to play much Ohio territory as evidenced by agent's activity in eastern Ohio, where the show blazed a trail with "coming soon" paper, but with few definite dates going up. Tack cards were used by the advance in most of the towns. The route was confined to the smaller agricultural centers. Ironton, April 25, was the initial Buckeye State stand.

The Harris show played Massillon, Ohio on May 14, and an article was sent into the *Billboard* on that date. The headline of the article read "Harris top and program cut." The story continued with, "Launched early in April in the South, Harris Bros. Circus since moving into Ohio has reduced the size of its big top and performance. Retrenchment was decided on after the show's patronage the first month fell way below expectations and as an economy move, Ray Marsh Brydon informed the *Billboard* representative. Business during the show's Ohio tour has been spotty, with an occasional stand making the show a little money, Brydon revealed."

"Program is very good for a small circus and is moving smoothly under the direction of Fred Crandall. Weather the past week has been bad for business, cold and rain keeping people from the lot. Matinees have been light."

"While not pretentious, show makes a good appearance on the lot. Side show has a long banner line. The show is billing heavily for a small trick, and newspapers have been giving it much space. It has been encountering plenty of truck show opposition since opening."

The Tom Mix show played Massillon on May 21 and Lewis Bros. was also in eastern Ohio at the time.

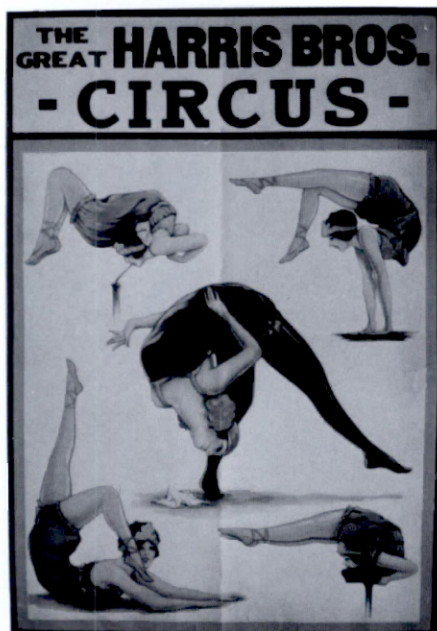
By May 24 the show was in Towanda, Pennsylvania. The show moved into New York and on June 6 played Windham, and then made six dates in the Catskill resort area. Other circuses in the Empire State at the time were Robbins Bros., Tom Mix, Barnett Bros., World Bros., Lewis Bros. and Newton Bros.

The 1938 season was taking its toll on circuses. The Col. Tim McCoy Wild

West Show lasted only a few weeks in the spring. Downie Bros. Circus closed on May 31, but reopened later in the season. Ringling-Barnum closed on June 22, and Seils-Sterling closed on July 4. Cole Bros. closed on August 3, and Newton Bros. gave up on August 10. The Hagenback-Wallace Circus folded in California in September. Somehow Brydon kept his show moving, but the end was coming.

Brydon ran an ad in the July 9 *Billboard*. Part of the ad read, "Despite all reports and gossip this show has been trouping every day since April 1, 14th week and without missing a pay day. In fact you can have it every night if you want it."

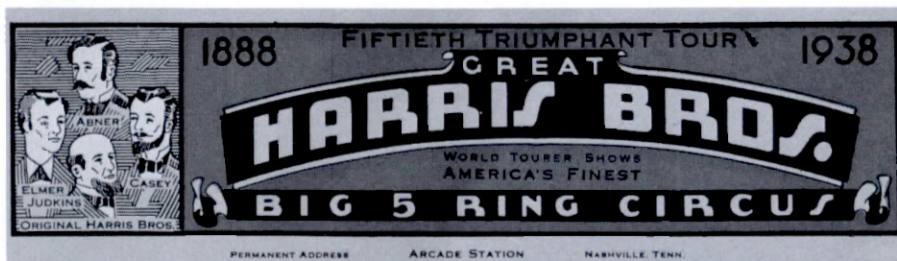
Ben Holmes resigned as general agent of the Harris show in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, on July 16. The ranks of the Great Harris Bros. World Touring Circus were getting thin.



This half sheet Donaldson lithograph was used during the 1938 short lived Harris tour.

The late Art Doc Miller visited the Harris show just before it closed. He writes, "I remember the final evening of the Great Harris Bros. five ring circus. Little by little the show had dwindled down to a couple of performers and was definitely on the lam to out run attachments on the fleet of trucks, all bought on the cuff, real slick like."

"I don't recall the hamlet where I caught it, as I was back tracking to my boss' outfit for more scratch to scoff on and get booking and gas money. Well, there it was, sitting beside the highway, a very small crowd of lot lizards hanging around with a small passel of patrons seated on the one erected section of blues. No side wall was up, so the butcherer hopefully could sell a few sacks of



The 1938 Harris Bros. Circus letterhead is printed in black and yellow on an orange background.

corn on the outside. Up on one truck sat the air calliope, forlorn, as there was no one to bang the keys, besides it needed gas to operate.

"The performance commenced without a tournament, just one lone girl performer bowing to one and all, while old Jim Dailey struck up a Scottish ditty on his bag pipes, and the performance was on. That poor girl did about everything she could think of, juggling medicine clubs, fire torches, even posed and waved from the swinging ladder, while red faced Jim blew with gusto on the few notes he knew on the blasted bag pipe.

"Yes, the calliope was for sale, \$25.00 by gosh, but that evening even I lacked a sawbuck. Somehow the truck finance outfit smoked out the show and took it away, bag and baggage, so to speak.

"What a sad finish to a small trucker that operated the season with much fan-fair about that five pole, 60 foot big top."

Thomas Owen Webb, who was with

The Harris show purchased some fine stock paper from the Donaldson Lithographing Company in 1938. The outlined title makes this big top interior poster look like a special design.

the Harris show that season, commented about the demise of the circus in a 1971 letter. He wrote, "Verle Hill, out of Streeter, Illinois, held papers on fourteen trucks which he repossessed after about five weeks of the season, which cut the show by about one half. Later Charlie Goss who held papers on the remaining trucks foreclosed."

The final mention of the Harris show appeared in the August 13 *Billboard*. The article follows, "Gettysburg, Pa., August 6. The Great Harris Bros. Circus scheduled to appear here yesterday, failed to arrive. Word from Hanover is that financial disaster overtook the show in that city Thursday evening, causing it to disband after giving afternoon and evening performances.

"Trucks and autos used to transport the circus were repossessed by former owners, and empty trucks of the Bantley All American Shows arrived in Hanover yesterday afternoon presumably to remove the menagerie and performing animals that had been the property of the circus.

"Ray Marsh Brydon, manager of the show, reported that good crowds attended both matinee and evening performances at Willow Beach Park in Hanover.

"E. J. Kelty, New York circus photographer, came here yesterday to take pictures of the show, only to be disappointed."



Thus concluded the history of the six title circus, that had toured from 1931 until 1938.

Georgie Lake was still with the show when it closed and he told in his letter about Brydon taking what he had left to the Bantley show, playing in nearby Berwick, Pennsylvania. Lake wrote: "Brydon put the circus big top on the Bantley carnival with us (the Lake family) and a few clowns and the Scotch band. The circus acts worked in between the side show acts and all that came from Atlantic City. I wound up doing a snake dance in the blow off in one end. And Jean-Jenett, the half and half, did a blow off in the other end of the tent. We stayed because I was working with George Lanning's high act out on the midway and getting paid. Brydon wanted us to go with him then in his store show, which he was framing. But we left and went to the Mighty Haag Circus for a few weeks and left just before that show closed. Ray got a small fortune from Mrs. Bantley so he gave her the top for what he owed her. A few weeks after he left O'Henry Tent came and took it away from her, as the top had not been paid for."

Brydon wrote a report on the Bantley carnival that appeared in the August 27 *Billboard*.

An advertisement appeared in the November 4 *Billboard* under the head-

ing of "World's Largest Traveling Museum, traveling on three large semi-trailers." It was clearly a Ray Marsh Brydon ad, using a post office box number in Nashville, Tennessee. So the flamboyant showman was back at it again in the fall of 1938.

He continued to operate his store show in the winter and had side shows on carnivals and in amusement parks in the summer.

In December of 1940 Brydon married Theresa Adkins, widow of Jess, co-owner of the Cole Bros. Circus. An article in the Elkhart, Indiana, newspaper stated that Mrs. Adkins had sold her interest in the Cole show for a reported \$70,000 at the end of the 1940 season. This was no doubt the biggest touch Brydon ever made. The two were married a short time.

During the 1940s Brydon was both rich and broke, always bouncing back. During this period he operated side shows at various amusement parks. In 1944 he had shows at Eastwood Park in Detroit and Summit Beach Park in Akron.

In 1945 Brydon leased the Lewis Bros. Circus equipment and toured a circus for a few months in the fall again using the Dan Rice Circus title. The show went broke in the South. He also operated a night club in Peoria, Illinois in 1945.

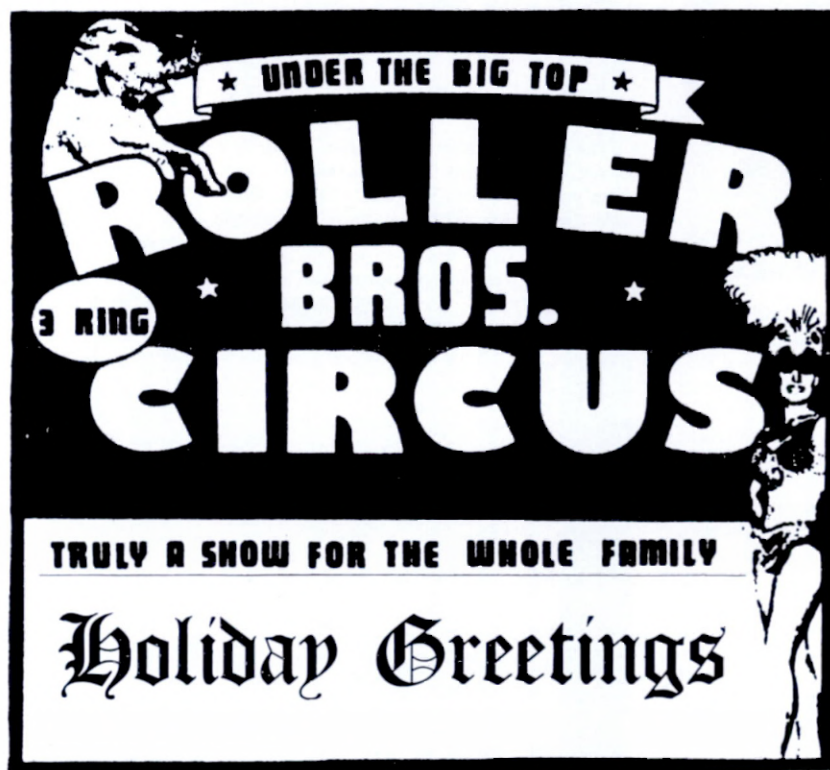
In 1946 he had four shows at the Texas State Fair and took an ad in the *Billboard* announcing that he had "picked the grapes at Dallas" grossing over \$71,000 in 16 days. That November 2, 1946 ad also stated that he needed acts for side shows in 1947 at Riverview Park, Chicago; Jantzen Beach, Portland; Ponchartrain Beach, New Orleans and State Fair Park, Dallas.

He continued his amusement park shows and became a bigger part each year at the Texas State Fair. In 1947 he was in charge of all of the midway shows at the fair and presented 19 different attractions grossing \$200,000, \$40,000 in one day.

His peak success came in 1949, when, as a supplier of midway shows, he provided all such attractions for major fairs at Dallas, Memphis, Louisville, Detroit, Hutchinson, Kansas and Little Rock. He featured Sally Rand that year.

By the early 1950s his star began to fade. He had a few attractions on the Gem City carnival, one was a small circus, called—what else—Dan Rice.

On June 6, 1954 he suffered a heart attack in his hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana. He died 10 days later in the Veterans Hospital, at age 55. He was truly one of the most colorful showmen in circus history.





Best wishes for
CHRISTMAS and the NEW YEAR
Ringling Museum of the Circus
on the grounds of . . .
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art
The State Art Museum of Florida
Sarasota

ROYAL HANNEFORD CIRCUS



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

to our Circus Friends
Everywhere

Tommy Hanneford, Struppi Hanneford, John McConnell
and all of the performers and staff of the

ROYAL HANNEFORD CIRCUS

and

ROYAL SANGER CIRCUS

WANTED
 ANYTHING PERTAINING TO THE FRED
 BUCHANAN CIRCUSES OF GRANGER,
 IOWA

YANKEE ROBINSON 1906-1920
 WORLD BROS. 1923
 ROBBINS BROS. 1924-1931

I will pay \$50.00 to locate and use photo of
 Circus train parked on siding at the
 Granger quarters

ALL LETTERS ANSWERED

**MERRY CHRISTMAS &
 HAPPY NEW YEAR**

JOSEPH S. RETTINGER
 P.O. Box 20371 Phoenix, Arizona 85036

Position Open

Executive Director. Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin. Responsible for supervision, administration of world's largest repository of circus material. Museum attracts 110,000 visitors annually, and includes 150 historic circus wagons, vast artifact collection, extensive lithograph and paper archive, library, railroad shops, 44 car circus train. In all, 27 buildings on 40 acres. Permanent staff of 12 supplemented by summer staff of 85. Museum owned by State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Director reports to and serves at pleasure of independent board. Director must have fund-raising capability. Responsible for acquisition and restoration program. Must be able to cordially deal with variety of individuals and groups. Salary from \$34,500 to \$48,400 depending upon qualifications and experience. Write for full details on application information, briefing packet. Completed applications must be received by December 31, 1984. Position starts late spring. Send inquiry to: Chairperson, Search Committee, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI 53913. Circus World Museum is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer.

RANCHO AZUSA PRODUCTIONS SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER!

THE CIRCUS BAND ALBUM
 (RECORD OR CASSETTE)

BY THE WINDSLAMMERS - REG. - 9.95 + 2.00 S+H

A
N
D

THE ALL NEW
 1985 CIRCUS CLOWN CALENDAR

BY BRUCE L. WARNER - REG. 5.95 + 2.00 S+H

FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY, ORDER BOTH TOGETHER FOR THE LOW, LOW
 PRICE OF JUST **\$12.95, + 2.00 S+H** BUT HURRY! OFFER EXPIRES
 AT MIDNIGHT, 1-31-85. SO DON'T DELAY, ORDER YOURS TODAY.
SUPPLIES ARE LIMITED!

✓OR M.O. FOR 14.95 PAYABLE TO
 RANCHO AZUSA PRODUCTIONS
 P.O. BOX 912
 AZUSA, CAL. 91702

ALLOW 2-5 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY
 OFFER EXPIRES AT MIDNIGHT 1-31-85

PLEASE SEND ME BOTH THE CIRCUS BAND ALBUM
 (RECORD ☐ CASSETTE ☐) AND THE ALL NEW 1985 CIR-
 CUS CLOWN CALENDAR FOR JUST 12.95 + 2.00 S+H
 TO: U.S. CURRENCY
 NAME: _____
 STREET: _____
 CITY: _____
 STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

A DIARY FROM THE HAGENBECK-WALLACE CIRCUS 1934



Introduction

The 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus is fondly remembered both by troupers and circus fans, and for good reason as both its personnel and equipment were the cream of what remained of the American Circus Corporation. A massive 50 car railroader owned by the Ringling interests, the show was the beneficiary of all but one other ACC show being taken off the road during the previous three years. As a result, Hagenbeck-Wallace had the pick of good Sells Floto and Sparks dates in the East, and John Robinson towns in the South besides its own traditional territory in the Midwest. Manager Jess Adkins was the industry's leading proponent of street parades, and as a consequence the march featured a remarkable collection of wagons: the Five Graces, the Ringling Bell wagon, the Lion and Snake, the Sells Floto Elephant tableau, the Carl Hagenbeck Lion tableau, the Lion and Gladiator, and the Two Jesters steam calliope. Likewise, a partial list of performers reads like a who's who: Clyde Beatty, the Cristianis, Rudy Rudynoff, the Codonas, Cheerful Gardiner, and John Heliott. Eddie Woechener had the band, and clown alley included such luminaries as Otto Griebeling, Paul Jerome, Joe Lewis, and Paul Jung.

The following is a transcription of 138 post cards written by Don Cash, a performer on Hagenbeck-Wallace that year, to his mother, Mrs. H. D. Cash of Stockton, California. Born in 1910, Cash got a job soon after high school painting billboards and banners in a

vaudeville theater, an association which led him to becoming a vaudeville performer. He and a friend, Frank Carry, formed a comedy juggling act called Cash and Carry which played vaudeville until 1933. Their circus career began on Hagenbeck Wallace in 1934 as part of a comedy hat and hoop juggling act called the Three Harddigs.

The 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace program featured this classic illustration of Clyde Beatty. The same design was used on the season route sheet. Jerry Cash collection.



Kelty took this great shot by apparently standing atop a building near the lot in St. Louis on May 11. Note huge menagerie tent at right center of photo. Pfening Archives.

The Harddig act was originated by Bill Harddig and went back into at least the late teens on the Ringling show, and in the 1920s appeared on various Corporation troupes.

Don Cash was on the Hagenbeck-Wallace & Forepaugh Sells Circus in 1935, and the next year appeared on Al G. Barnes. After his tour with Barnes he left the circus business, and settled in Hollywood, California where he had a distinguished career as a motion picture make-up artist. He specialized in what was called in the trade appliance and prosthetic work, the making of rubber pieces to change the characteristics of an actor's face. He was well known for his charity work at Los Angeles area hospitals where he helped scarred and maimed patients by molding prosthetic ears, noses, fingers and other extremities and by showing them how to attach the devices. Some of his techniques were incorporated in the first plastic eye, and during World War II he was stationed at Walter Reed Hospital near Washington where he fitted soldiers with prosthetics. He died in 1981.

This diary of fifty years ago is published through the courtesy of his son Jerry Cash, a CHS member from Glendale, California, who kindly made the postcards available to the Bandwagon. Only minor changes in grammar and

spelling have been made, and in no case has the content or meaning been altered. Readers interested in learning more about the 1934 Hagenbeck Wallace show are directed to Joe Bradbury's fine article, "Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, Season of 1934," in the March-April 1958, White Tops. Fred D. Pfening III.

Chicago, April 21st to May 6th: Opened with H & W circus for the season. Playing the coliseum for 16 days. First time with circus and being featured in center ring. Very thrilling. Clyde Beatty joined us Tuesday. Marvelous showman. Had narrow escape from tiger tonight, but came out ok. Had pleasure of lettering his trunks and received pay for it. First time I gambled was two days last week. Spent five cents each day on baseball pool and won both times. Beginner's luck, I guess. Everybody in dressing room calls me Lucky now. Had first picture taken as clown last Sat. Was in Chi Times. Was proud as many others was [sic] taken but not used.

Kokomo, Ind., May 7: First day under canvas. Fair crowd at matinee. Had late parade, the second of season. Had my first night travel on circus train. Berth I had was ok, but will be changed tonight for permanent berths. Excitement and things are coming so fast I can not think of what to mention first. Day by day as they come to me will put them down. Off all day tomorrow, traveling.

St. Louis, Mo. May 8: Enroute from Kokomo. Train arrived at 3 p.m. Went to lot and watched them pitch tents. Also waiting for cook house to get going. They still thought it was breakfast time. Had ham & eggs. May 9: Had three hours parade up town and back. Very hot. May 10: Had 11 o'clock call and had to be made up for picture, official of season of 1934. May 11: Nothing exciting happened today outside of the regular routine. May 12: Worked from 12 to 1 p.m. at a big department store down-

The show began the season with a torch light parade in Chicago to huge crowds. Note man carrying flare in front of horses. Gordon M. Potter collection in Pfening Archives.



Don Cash posed for this publicity shot in 1934. Jerry Cash collection.

town for the kiddies. May 13: Mothers' Day. Wore a carnation and packed up to leave.

Springfield, Ill., May 14: Had 9 o'clock call for parade, but got started at ten thirty. The actors are out for the first time in between shows practicing. The rings are full now. Acrobats in one, a man with liberty horses in the center, and some girls on swinging ladders in the last. Today is the first day of rain for us since we been out. It rained so hard during matinee show it leaked thru dressing room roof. Played to Governor of state tonight.

Peoria, Ill., May 15: Had a long parade this morning & got on lot very late. Had about a two mile hike. The grass is nice and green here, and makes a nice place to work. Had an addition to the show right after parade. A camel had a cute little baby. Also born during the show there was a hyena and that is an awful looking thing. This is in between shows, everybody seems very tired as it has been very hot all day.

Decatur, Ill., May 16: To start the day off right we had a five mile parade and one hour late in getting started, nice green grass in lot but very dusty. We are two miles out of city limits and a long hike to the sleepers. It is a nice hot day, but night turn[ed] cold tonight like it did last night. It looks like write home

day as everybody is almost back from the cookhouse, and the typewriters are banging away on the trunks.

Terre Haute, Ind., May 17: In between shows again, and about the only time off we have when we make parades. Changed the cars on us last night, and had to walk about five miles to find them. Have to get up every morning at nine o'clock to make parade except the days in which we are in a town more than one day. Usually we get away and almost to the cars before the show is over. That way we get out of the crowd which is nice. Lot very dusty and dirty here.

Evansville, Ind., May 18: Just finished lettering four of Clyde Beatty's chairs for him. What a swell guy he is. The hulligans are playing now and it is hard to think what to write. They have an accordian and guitar. Hulligans are foreigners which are here from Europe. That is the circus name for them. New route cards come out tomorrow. Forgot to mention we had an eight mile parade this morning. Will get some of the pictures taken tomorrow and the big one of everybody in Cincinnati.

Louisville, Ky., May 19: Two boys fell last night from the top of the tent in Evansville from a pole during their act and are still in the hospital there, also a girl whose horse run [sic] into a guy wire and fell on her. I did not see the girl get hurt because it happened after we left the lot for the cars. I saw the boys fall because we followed them with our act. It was awful. They could not help themselves at all. We had a nine mile parade today and the weather here is scorching hot. We have tomorrow off so will get a good rest in Cincinnati.

Cincinnati, Ohio, May 20: Sunday and did not work. Went to hotel for the night. May 21: No parade. The city would not permit it. Were we all glad, oh boy. May 22: Had our 5th straw house this season. Had people sitting almost out to the ring curb. May 23: The two boys and girl that were hurt arrived

Bandmen began seating for another parade in the Five Grace bandwagon which was the show's number one bandwagon that year. Gordon M. Potter collection in Pfening Archives.



here today ok. The girl worked, but the boys did not. They do not know when they will be able to. No bones broken, but bruised and shocked an awful lot.

Indianapolis, Ind., May 24: It started to snow when we pulled into town this morning, but turned to rain. It has rained so hard all day that we have had to put bricks under our trunks to keep them out of the rain. The big top is new and don't leak, but the dressing tent leaks like a sieve. We had another fellow hurt last night, and [he] is in the hospital here now. He is a cowboy, and he shot himself in the leg in the wild west show. Poisoning set in the powder burn.

Dayton, Ohio, May 25: Had a nice short parade. The weather is nice and sunshiny again today. We could not do our act last night on the account of the crowd. They took canvas and put it on the ground for the people to sit on. They sat clean up to the ring curbs, and you could not walk on the track at all. They cut most of the show out on the account of the crowd. We get to bed every night now about 11 and get up at 8 in the morning.

Columbus, Ohio, May 26: Saturday again, and pay day. We had a straw house this matinee which makes our ninth straw house. The cowboy who shot himself came back today to work. Well, tomorrow is Sunday, and our second Sunday off so will go to hotel for the day. We have our berth fixed up nice with colored oil cloth and creton curtains. It looks very homey. The weather is nice and warm today. Parades are now a habit, but today was a long one.

Charleston, W. Va., May 28: Had another parade today which was a long one. We are playing today on a ball park which is right next to a beautiful big river. The mountains are all green here and sure look nice. Just got back from about a mile hike after dinner down the edge of the river. Charleston is a pretty little city. Sunday went to hotel then to two picture shows, and called it a day. New route cards came out today.

Huntington, W. Va., May 29: Had a parade early this morning. The grounds here sit right in a little valley, and it is sure pretty and green. The Cadonas were out for the first time to practice in between shows. They are the world's best flying trapeze act, and they sure live up to that reputation. They were practicing a double pass with a triple somersault. It will be a sensation when they get it down. They did it twice perfectly today.

Parkersburg, W. Va., May 30: Got in town late and had a late parade and a long one too. The weather today is extremely hot. The lot is in a beautiful residential district, but only part has grass on it which makes it dusty and dirty in spots. Had straw house again today, in fact, I have lost track of them. Most of the big straw houses we don't do the act at all; just walk around and throw boomerang hats.



The "Giraffe-Neck" women from Burma were a feature of the show in 1934. This photo shows Prince Dah and Princess Mu Kauh ready to enter the big top for the tour of the hippodrome track they made each performance. Pfening Archives.

Clarksburg, W. Va., May 31: Had a very short parade on account of hills. The lot is lousy today. It sets right on the side of a hill like this [illustration of hill on original postcard]. One good thing, we are only two blocks from the sleepers. We will be in them and almost in bed by the time the show is over. I went hiking over the hills in between shows, and it sure is pretty scenery.

Fairmont, W. Va., June 1: Did not get a chance to write in between shows as we played a childrens' hospital after the matinee to make up with the mayor for not giving a parade this morning. It was impossible on the account of the hills. The whole city is nothing but rolling hills. Writing now in between the clown bride and the clown band. The elephants are working now and we are next and I am running out of card to write on.

Uniontown, Pa., June 2: Had parade and a nice short one this morning. One elephant went bad in the menagerie this afternoon and came tearing out through the back yard. They sent the whole herd of 32 after him and chained him to two of them, and drug him on his side a whole block back to the back yard, and then they took those hook sticks and beat him until he was blood from head to foot. So far though, he is ok.

Steubenville, Ohio, June 4: The lot here is dusty and dirty and it sets on top of a high hill. We had an awful parade this morning. It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been for the hills. The heat here today is extremely hot and sultry. The elephant that went bad the other day is ok now so far but they keep him chained in between two others. They are going to send him back to winter quarters.

Wheeling, W. Va., June 5: Excitement really happened in parade today.

First the parade got stopped on a hill which held us up for half an hour until they went to the back of the parade and brought up the elephants which they put two behind each wagon, and they pushed them up by their heads. The horses could not get a footing on the pavement. One cage slid into a parked car, and tore off the fenders and smashed in the side of it. No one was hurt—lucky.

Allegheny, Pa., June 6: Something held us up last night, and we did not get in here until eleven o'clock which made the parade at one. We paraded Allegheny, and then crossed the bridge and paraded Pittsburgh. We got back just in time for the show. I had a cold lunch in the cook house tho before the show. The weather has been threatening rain every day but not yet has it come down. It has also been very hot and sultry.

Greensburg, Pa., June 7: The parade was bad this morning. The whole town is nothing but hills. This is Nick's town so sent him a card out to Hollywood. Nothing much exciting happened today. The weather was much cooler and comfortable today. The big top in between shows was pretty crowded with performers practicing new tricks.

Johnstown, Pa., June 8: Well, this is the town of the famous flood. They could have another one and they would never miss the town from what I saw in parade this morning. The dressing room is now planning for a clam bake in Glouster, Mass., as we are Sundaying there the week after we play Boston. All the clowns are putting in 25¢ apiece a week until we get there. The new route cards come out next week, but we saw the advance man's route so we know where we are going.

Altoona, Pa., June 9: Well, this sure has been a wet, sloppy day. To start off with we left the lot for parade and got 5 blocks away and got soaked thru, and it only stopped raining about five minutes since all day. One break—the lot is only a half a block from the sleepers. In fact, the lot sets right next to the railroad. Received your letter and picture today, and was glad to hear from you. Lucky, I am near the finish as the top is beginning to leak like h---.

W. Philadelphia, Pa., June 11: Nothing exciting except we made the longest parade yet this season. June 12: We have a new dressing room and just as they got us moved in it, a big storm came up, but not a drop of water came through. The wind blew so hard that it almost blew it down; in fact, everybody got out and stood in the rain in the back yard, but it stood up ok. June 13: Had another baby camel born today just as the show was about to start.

Camden, N.J., June 14: As usual, had a long parade but during the parade we had to stop and wait as we had another increase in the circus. In one of the cages ahead of us which held up the

parade a deer had the cutest little baby you ever saw. It is only about a foot and a half tall. The lot is very sandy and it is hard to walk in. The new route cards should be out most any day now.

Pottstown, Pa., June 15: Had short parade. Outside of that nothing much happened exciting today. Had about a two mile hike to the lot this morning. Cars tonight are on a side track right out in front of the big top. Writing fast now to beat the crowd out the front to the first restaurant to get something to eat.

Allentown, Pa., June 16: The day is done with the same routine: parade, show, dinner, rest and another show, pack up and then tomorrow we go to a hotel for a good rest and bath. It is also pay day, and everybody seems more happy tonight than usual. We should be in early as we only have 76 miles to go. The baby deer looks like a little rabbit. It is an African species, and very small.

Trenton, N.J., June 18: In between shows again. I just finished putting Clyde Beatty's name on another chair and water bucket for him. He gave me a dollar and one of his pictures to me for doing the job. Had a good rest in the hotel yesterday. The shower bath caught h---. Clayton Codona of the Flying Codonas shared rooms with me. He is the same age I am and a swell kid. Frank stayed by himself in the cars Sunday.

Long Branch, N.J., June 19: Well, it rained all night and so far all day today. I got soaked thru this morning and changed clothes three different times and still wet. Will be glad to get back tonight to the cars to dry out good and warm again. This eastern weather is the s---. Give me good old California any time. If this is summer time in the east, give me Alaska or Africa. We got out of parade today.

Elizabeth, N.J., June 20: Writing on street car as forgot to write on lot. This lot is the worst we have been on yet. It was under water this morning and it was one o'clock before we got out for parade. The wagons would sink up to the bottom and it was all they could do to get them spotted. We waded in mud and water all day long. It feels good to get on a dry spot.

Montclair, N.J., May 21: Had the longest parade of the season today. We paraded two towns and the show started half hour late. The business was bad. The haul is five miles tonight to the cars. Yesterday we saw the Empire State Building and all of New York from the parade as the weather was very clear and it was only ten miles from where we paraded.

Middletown, N.Y., May 23: Did not send a card from Paterson as that is the home town of Tom Hart and all of his relatives were out to the lot all day and after the show we went to his sister's home and had some sandwiches and refreshments. We had a nice day here today with a nice short parade. We have a

beautiful lot also. All everybody in the dressing room now are talking baseball, and it sure is hard to try and write.

Boston, Mass., June 25-30 [Card postmarked July 1]: It has been one pleasant week here as have had visitors every day. The show did not do much business. We had to pose for another group picture Friday and we worked a childrens' hospital the same day. They took most of the show to the hospital, even the elephants.

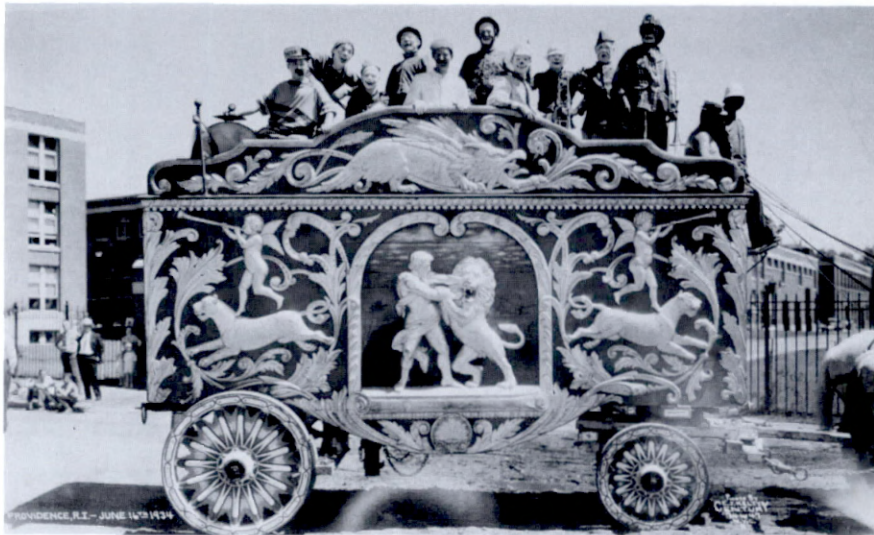
Lynn, Mass., July 2: Today we put in one of the most pleasant days of the season so far. The grounds are on a baseball field and it is like a carpet with lawn. The parade was easy and short. The most important of all, the cook house set about fifty feet from our dressing room. The cute little kids are now throwing firecrackers at the clown band in parade, and I will be glad when the 4th is over.

Portsmouth, N.H., July 3: Excitement sure happened today. Just as tonight's show was to start a big storm came up. The wind was so strong it almost blew the tents down twice. The lightning kept the sky just like daylight and the rain came down in buckets full. The wind was so strong we packed our trunk and locked them, and got in a wagon to watch the tents go but it was over in about 25 minutes.

Biddleford-Saco, Me., July 4: They sure gave us a treat today for supper. They had the cook house all decorated with flags and patriotic napkins in our glasses. The menu was chicken, peas, sweet potatoes, lemonade or ice tea, and for dessert we had ice cream and cake. I ate so much like a lot of others I had a stomach ache after supper. Had a little extemporaneous entertainment in the back yard in between shows tonight.

Lewiston, Me., July 5: Long parade

Cash rode on the Lion and Gladiator wagon as a member of the clown band in 1934. He is the second from left atop the tableau. Jerry Cash collection.



thru two towns and thru the country. Showing in the fair grounds, and that is way out. Writing by mail box in a crowd and is hard to write. A girl fell tonight in wild west line. I do not know how bad she was hurt yet.

Bangor, Me., July 6: In between shows again and a lot of activities in the back yard. Some jig bought a pair of boxing gloves and they had some boxing bouts between the big top jigs and the menagerie jigs. It was funny as it was more like a comedy to hear the rest of them on the side line cheer and boo one another.

Augusta, Me., July 7: Boy what country this is. Today all in about 15 minutes we had a wind storm, lightning, and the heaviest rain storm I have ever seen. It happened just as we got back from parade. The temperature was 98 degrees, and it dropped to 74 degrees and in twenty minutes it was back up to 94 degrees. What country. I would not take it if you gave it to me as a present.

Portland, Me., July 9: The weather here has been great both Sunday and today. The ocean and beach is only about one hundred yards in back of our dressing room, and in between shows we all went swimming and had a swell time. The girl that was hurt the other night was more frightened than hurt as she is only bruised up a lot.

Lawrence, Mass., July 10: Today we had the honor of having Jack Dempsey up on our clown bandwagon as a dare for five blocks this morning and is he still popular, boy! He invited us all out to his place in Mansfield tonight after the show, but can't go as we would miss the train. He used to drive stakes on this show before he was a champion.

Gloucester, Mass., July 11: Had very little time to write this as we all went swimming after the show as the bay is right behind the dressing room. It sets up on a cliff like and the beach is just below it. What a beautiful place. I got sun burned a little while in swimming, just got back in time to make the show.



Ed Kelty took his standard group picture of the 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace show at St. Louis on May 11. Pfening Archives.

Fitchburg, Mass., July 12: Well, to our surprise today one of our friends from one of the booking offices in Boston saw the show and came back to the dressing room to visit us after the show. In between shows I went swimming with a bunch from the dressing room as there is a lake just behind the dressing room. The water was warm and nice.

New Bedford, Mass., July 13: My birthday and the one day we had more work than usual. First of all, we had the engine break down last night and we did not get in until 11 o'clock. The parade did not go out until one o'clock, then we done the show, had supper, and went out to a crippled kid hospital and gave another show. The rest of the time after the show tonight will be mine—to sleep.

Providence, R.I., July 16: Nothing exciting happened today outside of a long parade this morning. Tom Allen, a friend of ours whom I met in Hollywood and he worked with Frank when he was a boy, came to see us today. He is living here with his folks. He sure was surprised to see us. He recognized Frank in parade.

New Haven, Conn., July 18: I did not send a card from New London as did not have time to write it as some circus fans from Bill's home town came down and gave us a big dinner downtown. We sure had a swell time. The clowns in the dressing room organized a soft ball team today, and had practice and I was elected first base on the white face team.

Hartford, Conn., July 19: Well, we played ball today and got beat. The tramps were too much for us. We had too many old men on our side. Frank and I was the youngest two on the team. The circus fans from Norwich, Bill's home town, are here again tonight. They are pretty well to do, and are giving us another party tonight. They gave us a swell dinner in New London.

Albany, N.Y., July 23: In between shows I went with Frank over to see the house he was born in, and the places

where he used to play when he was a boy. It looked natural to him, but he could not figure out why the house looked so old. He forgot that it is over fifty years old. The parade this morning was just exactly twelve miles long.

Amsterdam, N.Y., July 24: We had no parade today as we got in town late this morning, and the lot sets on top of a big hill they had an awful time getting the wagons up the hill as it has drizzled rain all day. I am having a hard time writing as the clowns have so much pep tonight they are throwing wet paper wads at each other.

Utica, N.Y., July 25: Well, we got wet last night but today was sun shiney and extremely hot. One good thing, the cars are only just across two tracks in back of the dressing room so we won't have far to walk tonight after the show. The paper wad throwing is just starting again so it is a good thing I am almost finished with this.

Watertown, N.Y., July 26: This is a lousy country today. It was so hot you could hardly stand it, and tonight just as the show started it started to rain like h---, and has kept up until now. This is next to the last number in the show now.

Ogdensburg, N.Y., July 27: Well, there is something new in the way of playing in the dressing room now. They pick out some one fellow who gets sore easy and hang a balloon full of water over his head to the top of the tent. Then somebody shoots the balloon with a tack which makes the guy all wet and sore, and everybody laughs.

Oswego, N.Y., July 28: Well, we played just across from the N.Y. Normal school for teachers today and what a beautiful place it is. Well, tomorrow is Sunday so I am hurrying up to get to bed so I can go to the hotel as that is our day of rest. Will write you a letter then.

Syracuse, N.Y., July 30: We have had

corn on the cobb for three days now, but today was the first day we could have seconds so I ate four of them. Eddie Lynch, a juggler whom I met in L.A. and is a good friend of Frank's, visited us today. He is out of show business and is a bartender now. I bought a camera yesterday the same size as the one at home so will be sending pictures.

Rochester, N.Y., July 31: This morning we went past the Eastman Kodak plant and the Graflex Camera Co. in parade. The Eastman plant is sure a beautiful place. They sure had a lot of cameras from every window and direction taking pictures of the parade. Clyde Beatty showed movies in the dressing room tonight which he took last week. I saw myself about 10 times in them.

Batavia, N.Y., August 1: Well, route cards came out today and we are to play our first Sunday shows since we left Chicago. The lot today is in the country fair grounds and about two and a half miles from the cars. I have been wanting to answer your last letter but could not think what to write in it. This week's *Billboard* has our baseball game score in it.

Auburn, N.Y., August 2: Joe Hardy, who used to work with Art Mowatt, was out to see us tonight. We had a late parade today due to getting in town late this morning. It looked like rain all day today, but so far it hasn't. We have a long haul so will leave town late tonight.

Elmira, N.Y., August 4: The last couple of nights it has been raining about the time we were ready to go home. I did not write yesterday as I mailed Auburn's card last night because the taxi stopped right by the mail box. I got wet two nights in a row now just walking from the taxi to the cars.

Wilkes-Barre, Pa., August 6: We had two beautiful days here, Sunday and Monday, also a short parade this morning. Yesterday evening in the lobby of the hotel there was an organ concert. I sat there for three hours listening to it. The lot is as smooth as a pool table which also makes it easy and nice today.

Scranton, Pa., August 7: Today we are showing in a coal bin. We are in a little valley in between five coal mines. When we walk you sink almost in coal dust. This is sure a dusty, dirty town. We got a break as our cars are only fifteen feet in back of our dressing room. There are railroad tracks all over the place here.

Binghamton, N.Y., August 8: Today was an awful long one. We have been going since morning. First we made parade, then a show, and in between shows we gave another one over to a hospital nine miles from here, and then came back and gave another show. We have not had our make up off since morning.

Hornell, N.Y., August 9: Well, today the show was changed on the account of the funny Ford being broke so we had

all of our clown numbers within the first hours of the show. Now we have an hour and fifteen minutes before we go in to the big top again. It seems like a vacation, but the first part of the show sure goes fast.

Olean, N.Y., August 10: Not much news for today except that one of the clowns dug up a golf club and ball so now the craze in between shows is miniature golf. They put up a nickle a piece before the same and the one with the lowest score wins the pots. I lost fifteen cents. Did you receive route card as yet received no letters on the new one.

Jamestown, N.Y., August 11: Well, it is Saturday night again and the stork visited the menagerie again today. One of Clyde Beatty's tigers had three of the cutest little kittens you ever saw. It happened right after the afternoon show and nobody knew anything about it until tonight when the tiger refused to leave the cage to work. They looked in to see why and there they were.

[On back of picture post card of Niagara Falls] Niagara Falls, N.Y., August 12: Mother: Having a swell time, and wished you were here. Sure is a beautiful site. Donald.

Buffalo, N.Y., August 13: Had a swell time at Niagara yesterday. Part of the horse shoe falls collapsed today, and at the same time I was there yesterday a lady committed suicide by diving from the elevated car that goes over the falls. I did not see it though. We had a packed and jammed full house tonight. I took pictures yesterday. Hope they turn out good.

Erie, Pa., August 14: Well, not much news to tell you today. I have not heard from you as yet. Is there anything wrong at home or did my route card come yet that I sent from Batavia? One of the property boys was just taken away a few minutes ago to the hospital with appendicitis. It came on him all at once.

Cleveland, Ohio, August 15-16: Yesterday we had a short parade, but got soaked as it rained hard all day. Today was sunshine part of the time. This city reminds me of Frisco. We are showing on the beach of Lake Erie, and the city is only three blocks away. The lake steamer is just pulling out from dock now for Detroit, a beautiful sight.

Sandusky, Ohio, August 17: Some excitement today as there is an American Legion convention on here. I guess you know the rest. The show has had very good business on both shows and what an audience! They laugh and applauded at anything. I am having the pictures developed in Detroit that I took at Niagara so will send you some.

Toledo, Ohio, August 18: Received a letter today from the folks on the ranch. They told me you were away to Santa Cruz. Well, tomorrow is our first Sunday working and the majority of the performers don't like it. Manager Cronin from the Al G. Barnes show visited us

today. The Barnes show is in Flint today.

Detroit, Mich., August 19: Sunday worked all day. Had lot of visitors from Barnes show today. August 20-21: On same lot for two days. Had one parade. Bought some new clothes today. August 22: Changed to a dirty lot today. Glad it is only one day. Well, we leave here tonight and come back Sunday for our second Sunday of work.

Flint, Mich., August 23: In a hurry to catch train last night I forgot to mail card from Detroit so will mail it Sunday when we come back. Got my last shot for typhoid today. The last two had no effects at all, but the first, oh boy! Mailing new route card tonight.

Bay City, Mich., August 24: Excitement today. Clyde Beatty accidentally shot himself in the leg during the act. A tiger charged him and hit his chair. In doing that it shot off the gun when it was pointing at his leg. He was not hurt bad. Writing this on a bus so can not write very good.

Saginaw, Mich., August 25: Clyde Beatty is in bad shape. He could hardly walk tonight but he did the act and it was very short. Every time he walks the blood starts to spurt out. His leg was just covered tonight when he came out of the arena. The lions and tigers were very uneasy and restless at the smell of blood tonight.

Lansing, Mich., August 27: Clyde Beatty had to go to the hospital yesterday but joined us today. He missed two shows. His leg turned for the worse. The newspapers all say that the tiger clawed him, but they are wrong. He told us tonight in the dressing room that he wished it had instead [of] him shooting himself. It would not have been so bad.

Ann Arbor, Mich., August 28: Clyde's leg is much better today. He went to the hospital today for treatment though. We had to go to a hospital in between shows to entertain the sick kids. The

The show used this odd wagon to advertise Frigidaire refrigerators in the parade. Note polar bear in cage in rear of wagon. Pfening Archives.



weather is cold as h--- today. We are all working with our street clothes on under our clown suits. I hate to wash up after this next number as the water is like ice water.

Battle Creek, Mich., August 29: They kept Clyde Beatty in the hospital at Ann Arbor. His leg turned for the worst. Infection set in. He missed today again and is compelled to stay there until it is well. They put us back in the center ring again in his place like they did in Chicago before he joined the show. The weather is just as cold as last night.

Muskegon, Mich., August 30: Clyde Beatty is still in the hospital and won't be able to be with us until next Monday in Fort Wayne. It is not serious, but they want him there under observation. We had no parade today as we got in late. We arrived at quarter to twelve, and by the time the wagons got on the lot it was time for the show. We were ½ hour late starting.

Grand Rapids, Mich., August 31: Clyde is still in the hospital, but out of danger. We got wet in parade this morning as the skys opened up while we were downtown, and soaked us. It warmed up though, this afternoon, and the sun came out. It turned out to be a nice day. The train is close tonight, so I guess we will get loaded early as we have a long run tonight.

Elkhart, Ind., September 1: Received your letter and pictures today. Did you receive two big pictures I sent you from Cleveland? You did not mention it in your letter. We have had showers off and on all day today. I will write Lyman tomorrow if I have time as I have quite a few business letters to write in regards to work when the show closes on the way home.

Fort Wayne, Ind., September 3: A lot of the people went to Chicago to see the Century of Progress and they got back at six o'clock this morning dead tired. I was going but after looking at the bunch this morning I am glad I did not go. I went to three picture shows yesterday. I saw Spec in one, and Clyde Beatty in another.

Lima, Ohio, September 4: Boy, the



Paul Jerome and Earl Shipley in a Funny Ford in the back yard at Natchez, Mississippi on November 1, 1934. Joe M. Heiser Jr. photo.

weather took a sudden change today and everybody dug out their overcoats. It is so cold tonight I am wearing all of my street clothes on under my clown suit. Clyde Beatty is still in the hospital and has not showed up yet. He is improving great though from the report we got today from Ann Arbor.

Akron, Ohio, September 6: This is the home of the rubber industry. In parade this morning we passed the Firestone and Goodrich tire factories. They are sure immense places. Well, Clyde Beatty is still in the hospital and the report we got today is that he will be able to join us again in Pittsburgh.

Youngstown, Ohio, September 7: I just finished writing some letters, and the heavens just opened up and boy is it raining now. Without any warning the storm just appeared and let loose. They are all talking today about the closing date of the show. Some say it is the 12th and some say it is the 5th of November. I hope it is the 12th as it means one more week's salary.

Sharon, Pa., September 8: Have had a photographer on the show for two days now who is the official photographer for the General Motors Co. in Detroit. He took a liking to my make up and has been on my tail all day taking my picture with everything from kids to automobiles.

Pittsburgh, Pa., September 10-11: Clyde Beatty came back today. He did not work as he is still walking on crutches. His leg is healing very fast though. The doctor, who comes from Norwich, is well known in the medical world. That is, he made some great x-ray discoveries in the research labs.

Cumberland, Md., September 12: We got in at eleven thirty this morning which is very late. We had a short parade and the show started half hour late. The reason we had to go over the Cumberland mountains and it was most all up grade. In fact, this town sets in the Cumberland gap where the soldiers went during the Civil War.

Hagerstown, Md., September 13: It has been a wet and dreary day all day today. It rained on us today in parade and all night last night. Well, we will be back in Baltimore again tomorrow. It

was a big jump again last night, and we got in late again this morning. In fact, we had a twelve thirty parade.

Baltimore, Md., September 14-15: We put in two of the most miserable days here. The first matinee started at 4:30 and should start at 2:15. We were in mud up to our knees. On top of that it rained today. We had a 17 mile parade and is my a-- sore from that dead ox wagon. We all are sure glad to get away from here.

Washington, D.C., September 17-18: Today we parade up Pennsylvania Avenue right in front of the Capital, the White House and most all of the government buildings. Yesterday I went through the Smithsonian Institute and visited Washington Monument. I rode around the Capital in a machine three times last night. This is the most thrilling experience I have had in any town so far.

Richmond, Va., September 19: Excitement today. A lion escaped during parade. It did not last long as they cornered him and shot him. Sent some newspaper clippings. I was not in danger as I was up on the wagon. They go first for horses and not for human beings. In fact, they will run from them until cornered, then they will fight.

Petersburg, Va., September 20: Well, the excitement is all over now about the lion escaping. We heard this morning it was broadcasted over the radio from S.F. last night in the news events. This is the first time this has happened in years. We were lucky this morning. When we got back from parade it started to rain and kept it up all day long.

Newport News, Va., September 21: What a day! It rained so hard today it flooded our dressing room out. It was like a lake. The water came up to the lock on my trunk all in about five minutes. We have been almost up to our knees in water since the matinee. I took stakes and put them in the ground and put my trunk on top.

Portsmouth, Va., September 22: No

parade due to late arrival. We had to come over here by ferry from Newport News last night and our boat got lost in the fog. We left there at 12:30, and got in here at 10 minutes past 4 in the morning. They made a mistake and sent the second section first and could not do anything until the 1st section arrived.

Norfolk, Va., September 24: Nothing much to write about today. This is the first day we did not get rain. We just got a small drizzle this morning during parade, then the sun came out for a nice day. Can't write good as I am writing on the street car.

Rocky Mount, N.C., September 25: This is the tobacco distributing town of the country. The whole city consists of nothing but tobacco warehouses. Sent some leaves of tobacco today that I picked myself. Let me know if you get them. From Norfolk this way was a sudden change of language to me. Everybody here talks like niggers. It is so funny to hear them.

Kinston, N.C., September 26: Short parade, nice business and a great audience. The coaches are only two blocks away from the lot which makes it a nice date. Well, the report now is we close November 8th. We soon will be getting it on the route card. We are south now as we had a nigger band in the back yard tonight [word illegible]. It was a home made affair.

Greenville, N.C., September 27: We had an awful time in getting on the lot today as it is very sandy. They killed two horses pulling on the light plant. They had ninety two horses and four elephants behind pushing the wagon to get it on the lot. The wheels did not turn at all. They just drug it flat on the bottom. In fact you could not see the wheels. We had no parade. In fact, we had to unload our own trunks.

Washington, N.C., September 28: We never got out of Greenville until seven o'clock this morning which made our parade at one o'clock and a late show. This lot is much better today. The clowns are all invited up to the Elks' Club tonight after the show for some sandwiches and 3.2 beer. This is one of the heavenly states that voted dry and is dry. But, oh boy, the drunks in the show.

Wilson, N.C., September 29: Just another Saturday and the show went on as usual. Bombayo left today for one week to play a fair which makes a little more work for us. The people move so slow here that it takes you a week to go a block. The lot is a long ways out today.

Raleigh, N.C., October 1: The governor of the state came in the dressing room tonight before the show, and shook hands with all of us. He sure was a swell scout. He told us stories and wished us all good luck. He sat right in front of us during our act. I could have stepped five feet from where we were working and touched him. He gave us a big hand on the finish of the act.

Fayetteville, N.C., October 2: Today has been very warm, but tonight has turned just the opposite. One of Clyde Beatty's pictures is showing downtown and we are all invited down to see it after the show tonight. It will be a special show. The ground through this part of the country is like California. Yesterday it was red clay, but most of it is sand and is hard to get wagons on and off of.

Goldsboro, N.C., October 3: Saw Clyde's picture, and it was much better than his first one. Bought some clothes today from a former clown on this show who has a clothing store in this town. He gave us all ten percent discount. A new route card came out tonight, but I missed them. It is as far as Pensacola, Florida. Will get one tomorrow and send it.

Wilmington, N.C., October 4: Got in late, but the parade left the lot at eleven and it was a short one. After parade it started one of those San Francisco fogs, a heavy mist like, which turned into a drizzle rain. It never has stopped all day and [is] still going. If you stay out in it for five minutes you would get soaked through without a rain coat.

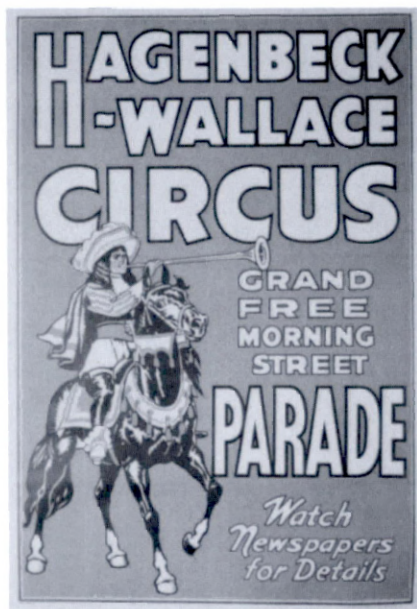
Florence, S.C., October 5: Rained just a little bit tonight then stopped. This is the best lot we have had for two weeks. It is solid hard sand. We had a little excitement in the back yard tonight. A pony scared an elephant by coming around the end of a wagon in the dark under his feet. He took after the pony and would have killed it if he had not hit his shins on the tongue of a wagon and fell.

Sumter, S.C., October 6: It drizzled rain off and on all day today. I won a dollar and a half on the world series today from Clyde Beatty. It was the first and only bet I have made so far. Boy, did I razz Clyde when Detroit walked away with the game with a score of 10 to 4. We are all going up to his room tomorrow and listen to his radio of the game.

Charleston, S.C., October 8: I met a De Molay boy here yesterday from Mims, Florida. He is a past master counselor, and he has his own orchestra here in a night club. He took Clayton and I up to the club and treated us to a steak dinner which cost \$2 a plate. He sure treated us royally. They had a nice floor show which I enjoyed. He came out to the lot and we took him around, then put him in the show.

Columbia, S.C., October 9: Well, tomorrow we will be in a new state. The day went fast as we got in late and had a late parade. Also, a late show. We are showing a fair ground today and the cars are just across the street from the lot. We are just two miles from town. We circled the capitol today on all sides in parade. The business was very good all day.

Augusta, Ga., October 10: Had to go to the dentist this morning. I woke up with a terrible tooth ache. A filling had



This one sheet upright lithograph advertised the parade. Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

cracked in two. I got excused from parade and just did make the afternoon show. I had three filled while I was there are they needed it. We had one of the worst storms yet this afternoon during the show and it lasted until 6:30. The seats in the big top floated away all over the lot. They had to shoot holes in the big top where water pockets formed to keep from tearing it.

Anderson, S.C., October 11: Mu Kauh, the giraffe neck woman from Burma, gave us all a treat this afternoon, in fact some [people got] sick. The grasshoppers here was thick and big, so

The Commissary and Time Department wagon on the back lot, season of 1934. Gordon M. Potter collection. Pfening Archives.



she and her husband caught a big bunch of them and we saw them build a fire and put them in it. We watched and when they were cooked she pulled them out and ate them. She took off the heads and ate the rest. Late arrival and no parade for today.

Greenwood, S.C., October 12: The lot today was nice, all but the dressing room. It sat in a big mud hole. I had a whole bail of straw under and around my trunk. The rest of the way out to the big top we had to walk on bricks, planks, and straw. Well, the date is definitely set now for the show is going to close November 12 in Memphis, Tenn. It won't be long before I am homeward bound.

Athens, Ga., October 13: Got in town late and had a late parade, also show. The business was bad this afternoon due to the football game between Georgia and North Carolina. The college boys in the show tonight are a bit noisy even though they did get beat. They are a nice audience to work to. Everybody is now talking of where they are going when the show closes, being only a short time off.

Rome Ga., October 15: A nice day today. It was warm this afternoon, but tonight is very cold. In fact, we are all wearing our street clothes under our clown suits. We had a nice short parade today as the lot is only five blocks from town. The blankets will come out tonight as it will be cold as h--- in the cars. There is no heat in them except for one, the dining car.

Anniston, Ala., October 16: I saw about ten men today dressed in white with chains on their feet and a guard followed behind them going down the road. It was some prisoners of the Alabama chain gang. The fall of the year has set in as it gets dark now about five o'clock and begins to get cold. It sure is dreary until they turn on the lights. Some of the boys have candles and they light them and stick them up on their make up racks.



Don Cash, left, and Frank Carry, right on the lot in 1934. Jerry Cash collection.

Birmingham, Ala., October 17: Had a ten mile parade this morning and it was a hot one. Russell Bros. Circus was showing on this same lot yesterday and they were just pulling off when our first wagon hit the lot. It is a small motorized show and they all travel in autos. The show played to a turn away business tonight with people sitting up to the ring curbs. You could not work if you tried.

Tuscaloosa, Ala., October 18: Excitement ruled for a few minutes tonight. This is a college town and the college boys were out for a fight and they got it. They cut the ropes on the tent and tried to crash the front door of the show. The manager ordered all the rough necks out to fight and they went out with stakes and pieces of pipe. It did not last long as the boys all ran. It was the first like it that has happened in years.

Selma, Ala., October 19: In parade this morning we saw a whole truck load of niggers with the typical chain gang suits of stripes on. All of their legs had chains and a large ball on the end. They all seemed happy and hollered with joy when we came by. The weather today was just like southern California and it sure made me home sick as it was the most decent day we have had for weeks.

Montgomery, Ala., October 20: Route cards came out today so will mail them tomorrow. Today was an ideal Califor-

nia day. Well, tomorrow we are in a new state, Florida. It is the only town in Florida we make. This is another capital city for us. We went up to it in parade, then turned left and went down the main street. I am going fishing tomorrow in the Gulf of Mexico. A party is going from the show.

Pensacola, Fla., October 22: John Ringling, the owner of this circus and Ringling Bros. shows, was here this afternoon and night. He sat right in front of us both shows with the manager of the show. Tonight all through our act we could see them pointing and talking about us. We heard from a friend of the manager's that he likes our act very much. He said it was something different. We are doing a lot of hoop juggling now.

Mobile, Ala., October 23: The Gulf is right in back of our dressing room and in between shows we went crabbing. We got some lion meat and tied it on to some string and drug it on the bottom of the water. We hired a row boat, and went all along the coast. We sure had fun, but only caught one crab. That crab has been in everybody's pocket or trunk in the dressing room tonight. What a laugh we have had.

Gulfport, Miss., October 24: This is our first time in Mississippi and business is bad at this stand. It is a small town. We can see the Gulf of Mexico from the show grounds here. The town sits right on the edge of the water. Some of the people went swimming in between shows. I did not go because my bathing suit is at the sleeping car. We are heading north tonight and I guess we will lose our warm weather soon.

Hattiesburg, Miss., October 25: It is colder tonight and it rained this morning, but cleared up for parade. The sun shined until 4:30. There was a house [which] burned to the ground tonight about three blocks from the lot. It happened just as the show was to start. They asked for the man who was supposed to have lived there over the loud speakers. I have not as yet found out whether or not he was in the show.

Meridian, Miss., October 26: Received your letter today, and card from Art. I

Bulls return to lot from parade at Vicksburg, Mississippi on November 2, 1934. Joe M. Heiser Jr. photo.



Clyde Beatty was the star of the performance in 1934. He is shown here during the early 1930s on Hagenbeck-Wallace. Pfening Archives.

received the others too. I will try to be home by Dec. 12th, but we are going to work on the way home. The day was warm here, but much cooler than yesterday. We had a late parade due to the fact we are only five blocks from town. Our coaches are right at the depot which makes it handy.

West Point, Miss., October 27: This is the worst dud for the season. The town is eighty per cent colored and they have no money. They haven't even got a half a house full. The town is about the size of Tracy. The weather is still getting colder. This is the worst state in the union so far that we have been in for money. They all seem to be broke here.

Jackson, Miss., October 29: Another capital town, and the show grounds sit right in back of the capitol down a little hill. The governor of the state and "Kingfish" Huey Long saw the show tonight. Had a late parade due to the waiting of school buses to arrive from surrounding towns to see it. We had two straw houses today. Business was great.

McComb, Miss., October 30: Had two shows of good business. We practiced in between shows a lot of new hoop tricks. I can pass eight hoops now and we are going to put it in the act as soon as we start playing vaudeville again. I practiced hard in order to learn how. With eight in the air it looks like twenty. Well, only eleven more days to the end of the season.

Brookhaven, Miss., October 31: Well, it is Halloween, and we had a party tonight for the kids on the show. We had jack o'lanterns, candy corn, hats, horns, and everything for them. Before the show was over tonight, they liked to drove us nuts hiding behind wagons and jumping out at us when we were in a hurry to make a number trying to scare us.

Natchez, Miss., November 1: Well, today we were pretty busy. We took our sailors and cut them down and started to put new cloth on them in between

shows. Sunday, I am going to scrape and sandpaper our hoops. Then the job of painting and papering them. We are getting them all ready for vaudeville. It rained hard this morning, then cleared off for the rest of the day.

Vicksburg, Miss., November 2: This is a historical place. In fact, in between shows I went out to the battle field cemetery. This is the place which decided the turning point in the Civil War. Some of the old relics that were used then are downtown. We saw them in parade this morning. I read some of the tablet which was erected in memory of the soldiers of the south and they sure are interesting.

Yazoo City, Miss., November 3: We were late in getting in this morning and had a late parade. It threatened for a storm this morning, but only sprinkled a little bit, then the sun came out for the rest of the day. The days are getting shorter now. It is getting dark around 4:30. I may drive Clyde Beatty's Lincoln car out to Hollywood for him. I will know sometime next week. He is going out to make a picture.

Clarksdale, Miss., November 5: We are showing today on a cotton field, and the stubbles are terrible. The town is so small we could not get a room in a hotel yesterday. The hotels were all filled up

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SEASON 1934

so I came out on the lot and scraped all of our hoops and repainted them. I also painted and lettered five trunks for the clowns that are going to department stores to work for Christmas.

Greenville, Miss., November 6: It was a nice warm day, but tonight is cold and I don't mean maybe. The railroad men from all of the lines have been here today selling tickets to people going to all parts of the world. There are two special cars going to New York, and one to St. Louis leaving the night we close in Memphis. There is a special baggage car with each to carry all of the baggage.

Greenwood, Miss., November 7: The weather is much warmer today. Nice business this afternoon and fair tonight. There is but eight more shows and four more parades. Had some Mexican tamalis tonight. There was a Negro with a pushcart in the backyard selling them in between shows. We practiced some

more. You should see the act now. You would not know it we have improved so much.

Columbus, Miss., November 8: Got in town late and had a 1:30 parade, putting the two shows almost following one another. We had to come over a little old dinky railroad line that just runs between Greenwood and Columbus. It only has two engines. One is used for the passenger train, and the other for freight. We had to wait for one section to go, then the engine came back for us.

Tupelo, Miss., November 9: Well, it sure is nice weather today. The lot is in the fair grounds, and a nice lot. The sleeping coaches are so close you can throw a rock from the dressing room and hit them. It has been an ideal day. I bought a dozen and a half of hats today as our hats got wet and mildewed. We are getting all fixed up for our work on the stage this winter.

Corinth, Miss., November 10: Boy, the weather sure changed today. It is so cold that there is eight buckets of charcoal burning in the dressing room to keep warm. Well, just three more performances and one parade, and we are through for the season. The baggage man was here tonight with checks for our trunks so there won't be a big rush the last night.

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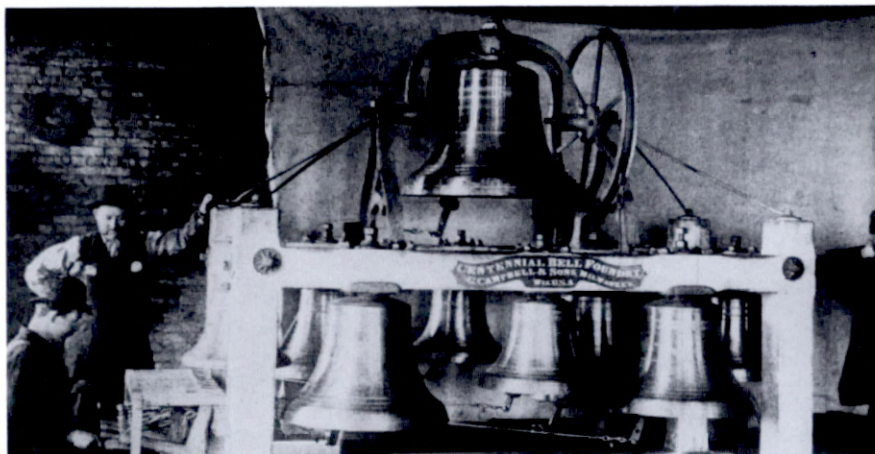
The Ringling Bros. Bell Wagon

Fred Dahlinger Jr.

A venerable piece of Wisconsin's circus history returned home on November 30, 1984, when the famed Ringling Bros. bell wagon arrived at Baraboo's Circus World Museum. The wagon has been placed on loan to the museum via an agreement reached with Kenneth Feld, owner of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Underscoring the priority which his family has placed on preserving the heritage of the Greatest Show on Earth, Mr. Feld has also given a substantial monetary grant to the museum to fund the vehicle's restoration and other worthy projects. Daily concerts will be given on the wagon at the museum, and it will be featured in the planned 1985 circus parade.

The best available evidence suggests that the bell wagon was the first major parade wagon constructed especially for the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows. Following a typical circus practice, the Ringlings purchased their first wagons second hand from fellow showmen. The construction of the wagon marked a significant change in Ringling policy and denoted one step in the path which led to their eventual domination of the circus business. Within a decade after the bell wagon's construction the Ringlings became generators of surplus and second hand assets which were peddled to lesser showmen.

Before delving into the history of our primary subject, it is appropriate to review the various chimes and bell wagons which antedated the Ringling vehicle. The innovative duo of Gilbert R. Spalding and Charles J. Rogers were the first circus impresarios to utilize a series of bells as an attraction. About 1853 they purchased a set of bells from G. W. Coffin, proprietor of the Buckeye Bell Foundry in Cincinnati, Ohio. The bells were not mounted in a wagon but placed at the front roofline of their Floating Palace. Similar in function to



Taken inside the Moeller plant early in 1892, this photo shows the bell framework as it was received from the Campbell

foundry. Note the massive size of the timbers used to construct the frame. Milwaukee County Historical Society.

church and school bells, which called citizens to worship or instruction, these bells called patrons to performances on board their floating showplace.

The earliest circus bell wagon for which a description survives was the one owned by the 1875 Van Amburgh & Co. Golden Menagerie. It was described as a tableau car with a chime of six bells, drawn by six horses. The February 20, 1875 *New York Clipper* reported that it was to travel in advance of the show as a bill wagon. Forepaugh also claimed to have a bell wagon in 1875, but other than a short mention in the *Clipper*, no confirmation concerning its existence has been found.

Cooper & Bailey carried a bell wagon in the late 1870's, a fanciful depiction of it appearing in some of the show's lithographs. In 1880 their No. 1 advertising car was fitted with a set of bells, thirty in number, the largest weighing 442 pounds according to an account printed in the April 30, 1880 *Clipper*. As early as 1876 the P T. Barnum hippodrome

show was parading a bell wagon. The June 13, 1876 *New Bedford (Ma.) Evening Standard* reported it was automatic, suggesting the bells were operated by a pinned cylinder mechanism. This was the same year that the show carried a tableau upon which was placed a replica of the Liberty Bell.

The earliest bell wagon about which a reasonable amount of information survives is the vehicle which was on the Barnum & London show by the early 1880's. If it dated back to the 1870's, it's probable that it was the Barnum show chimes chariot. The wagon had the typical box shape with two large ovals in each side through which the bells could be seen. It subsequently was used on Barnum & Bailey, going to Europe with the show from 1898 to 1902. The last year it was paraded was 1904, and at a later date it was apparently dismantled. Two of the statues from this wagon are on display at the Circus World Museum, rescued from the Bridgeport winterquarters by John



M. Kelley, longtime Ringling attorney and founder of the Baraboo museum.

Barnum & London advertising materials depicted the bell wagon as having a large number of small to medium size bells, suspended from an A frame support. Since the wagon continued to be used as a bell wagon through 1904, it is not known which set of bells was offered at the December 11, 1894 Barnum & Bailey surplus sale. The catalog for that event listed "1 set of bells, frame and handles for musical wagon."

Acknowledging the popularity of the Ringling vehicle, their cousins, the Gollmars, proceeded to construct a bell wagon for their circus. The exact year in which the vehicle was built has not been determined, but sometime in the 1890's seems logical. The single known photograph of it depicts an overland show wagon, possibly constructed from one of the small cages which the show owned. The bells it housed were not nearly as imposing as the Ringling set, resembling in size and shape the handbells worked by Swiss bell ringers. Presumably the wagon was dropped by the Gollmar show around 1903 when it converted from overland to railroad operation.

The designer of the Ringling bell wagon departed from the box body precedent, creating an open framework

Home again for the first time in at least fifty years, the bell wagon is shown upon its recent arrival at the Circus World Museum. The wagon will be fully restored to roll in the 1985 Milwaukee parade. Circus Wagon Museum photo.

design which accentuated the bells instead of the carved housing. This was made feasible by the size of the bells, their scale being sufficiently large to prevent them from being obscured in the overall design. Based upon documents surviving from later transactions, it is likely the Ringlings acted as their own general contractor for the wagon, parceling out various portions of the new vehicle to trade specialists. A triumvirate of Wisconsin businesses were selected for the work, with one firm furnishing the bells and their supports, another constructing the wagon

On an early spring day in 1892, the men who constructed the bell wagon posed beside it in front of the Moeller plant in Baraboo. From left to right, the standing men are Ernest Mulke—helper, Otto Schutlz and Tom Hearn—blacksmiths, Henry Moeller Jr.—foreman, Henry Moeller Sr.—wagon maker and carver, Dan Schilling—painter and carver and Corwin Moeller—woodworker and carver. Circus World Museum Collection, Baraboo, Wisconsin.



and a third supplying the carvings to decorate the vehicle. Surprisingly, the final result held together very nicely from an aesthetic point of view.

A sign on the side of the bell framework announced that the Centennial Bell Foundry of Milwaukee, Wisconsin had produced the bells. Although the name G. Campbell & Sons is given, Milwaukee directories indicate the firm was actually Campbell, Gardiner & Sons. The principals, Henry R. Campbell and George G. Gardiner, operated a bell and iron foundry and machine shop at 238-256 Oregon Street. The Centennial name probably originated with the shop's opening for business in 1876, the nation's centennial year.

The *Sauk County Democrat* of February 25, 1892 reported that the bell apparatus had arrived in Baraboo three days earlier, and that they were being placed in storage at the Ringling quarters until the wagon was built. The *Democrat* of March 3, 1892 announced the bells were out of tune and would have to be recast. Whether this action was actually undertaken is not known.

The bells ranged from nineteen to thirty six inches in diameter at the bottom, and from fifteen to twenty eight inches high. Although it is the only one mounted in a yoke stand, the topmost bell did not rotate, but was fixed in position, as were the other bells. They were sounded by a clapper which was activated by a lever at the rear mounted console. The small number of bells, nine, limited the player to only the simplest of tunes. The 1894 Ringling route book indicates that "The [My?] Old Kentucky Home" and "Nearer My God to Thee" were played, in addition to anthems, hymns and popular airs. In 1941 correspondent of the *Billboard* reported that he had played "Rock of Ages," "Greenland's Icy Mountains" and "Dixie" on the bell wagon in 1893. Al Ringling allegedly liked the playing of church tunes on the bells.

Except for six big wagons built at Cincinnati in 1903, all of the wagons used by the Ringling show were constructed by their cousins, the Moellers of Baraboo. The business dealings between these two firms spanned over four decades, a tribute to the quality vehicles which rolled out of their shop on Baraboo's Third Avenue. Henry C. Moeller, Sr. (1828-1908) founded the firm in 1856, setting up his wagon shop in connection with a blacksmith shop owned by a cousin, G. C. Gollmar. In 1872 the business was destroyed by fire, but it was rebuilt and back in operation by 1877. Moeller was later assisted in the business by his two sons, Henry C. Jr. (1868?-1957) and Corwin G. (?-1946). In 1891 the name of the firm became Moeller & Sons to denote their contributions.

According to notes made by Henry Jr., the Moellers entered the circus wagon business in a small way in 1884, the first year of the Ringling circus.

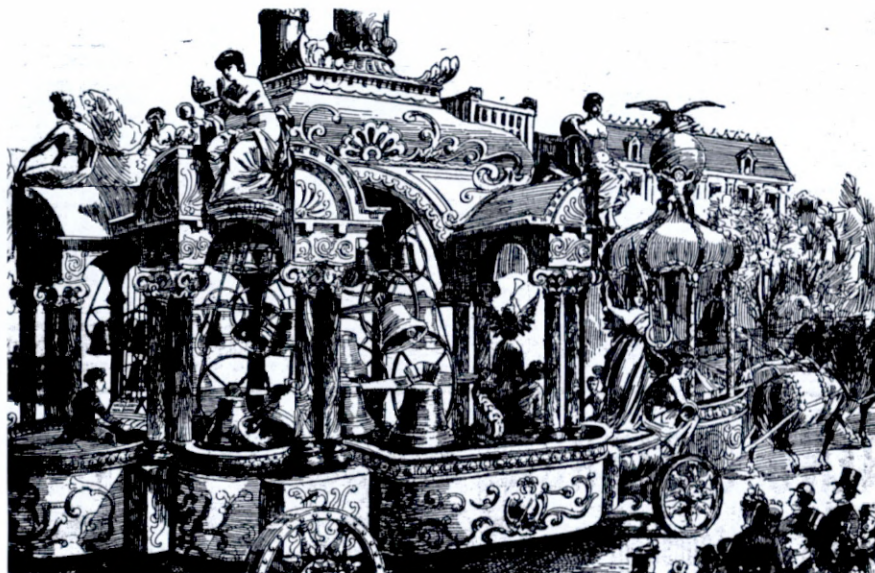
These early wagons were more on the order of heavy duty carriages than circus wagons, but by 1890 the Moellers were repairing full sized railroad show wagons.

On February 25, 1892 the *Sauk County Democrat* reported that nine men in the Moeller shop were working on Ringling wagons. One of the vehicles under construction was a hippo den, the first of three the Ringlings owned. Also in the shop at the time was the bell wagon, but curiously the Baraboo papers did not mention it.

In a 1949 communication with Richard E. Conover, Henry Moeller, Jr. recalled that Keem Repski of Milwaukee furnished the carvings for the bell wagon. The Milwaukee directories of the 1890's do not list an individual or business with this name and it is our belief that the name Moeller spoke or scribbled was a corruption of the names Kuehns and Papke, the owners of the Milwaukee Ornamental Carving Co. (MOCC), the firm which usually supplied the carvings applied to Ringling wagons. The MOCC was founded in 1886 primarily to do interior and exterior decoration in both wood and plaster for homes and businesses. Their proximity to Baraboo made them an obvious choice to do the carvings for Ringling vehicles being built by the Moellers.

Carl V. Kuehns was the artistic member of the firm, and Otto H. Papke (1856-1943) handled the accounting and financial aspects of the business. Originally there was a third partner, Joseph Grauvogel, but he dropped out by 1896. When the wood carving business evaporated, the firm concentrated on its plastering work, decorating such Milwaukee showplaces as the Oriental, Pabst, Palace and Wisconsin Theatres. The firm was dissolved shortly after Papke's death in 1943.

The carvings for the bell wagon were among the earliest carvings supplied by MOCC to the Ringlings. During the next two decades the MOCC artisans furnished the carvings for a multitude of Ringling parade wagons. Included in this output were the decorations for the 1893 tableau dens, the Ringling tableaux of the late 1890's, all of the floats and new wagons for the 1903 upgrading (except the six vehicles Bode built), the Paradise cage, the Swan bandwagon, and numerous cage wagon corners and skyboards. Working from verbal descriptions or cuts clipped from periodicals and books, MOCC carvers contrived decorations for wagons which were being built 120 miles away. Most carvings were done on a time and material basis, the labor rate being forty cents per hour, ten cents higher than the Moellers charged. In some cases drawings and models were furnished for criticism; one drawing, for the Paradise cage, is preserved in the Fred D. Pfening III collection. A few pieces of the Ringling-MOCC correspondence from



Ringling advertising materials of the early 1890's featured cuts and descriptions of the new Musical Bells of Moscow.

The most common illustrations grossly exaggerated the wagon's size and decoration. Pfening Archives.

the 1902 to 1914 period have survived, but nothing exists which reveals additional information concerning the bell wagon carvings.

A comparison of the bell wagon decorations and other early Ringling vehicles reveals a repetition of several design elements. The similarity is most notable in a bandwagon which was referred to as the white bandwagon in the 1890's route books. Both vehicles featured centrally located masks with carved swags or garlands on either side. The bell wagon had bare breasted and winged maidens at the corners of the bell frame while the white bandwagon was fitted with dragons having similar cleavage and wings. Additional duplication of design can also be found in the minor carvings. The repetition of the same concepts suggests that both were

inspired by the same pattern book or guidelines.

Having invested considerable money in their new feature, the Ringlings naturally made a big play on it in their advertising. Engravings used in newspaper ads, couriers and lithographs depicted a feature of Bromdignagian proportions, towering above parade spectators. This was no ordinary bell wagon in their eyes but "The Colossal Cathedral Chimes of Moscow's Famous Kremlin Tower." In an early description printed in the April 2, 1892 *Clipper*, the Ringlings claimed that the wagon was so tall that a special railroad car with a cellar had to be constructed to haul it. While such cars were actually built by two other circuses, one glance at the bell wagon places this claim under the fable, and not the fact, column. It was a big feature, however, as the publicity and enjoyment it created more than compensated the Ringlings for their expense.

One advertising cut depicted the bell wagon being drawn by a self propelled

One of a few good side views of the bell wagon in its original configuration is this photo, taken at Columbus, Ohio on 4 June 1900. Note how far behind the rear axle the player sat. Albert Conover collection.



steam traction engine, a device referred to as the Mammoth Highway Locomotive Hercules in publicity materials. The Ringlings did indeed have such an engine, a nickel plated ten horsepower unit built by the J. I. Case Co. of Racine, Wisconsin. Available accounts do not concur with the engraving as the engine was actually used to pull a string of animal dens.

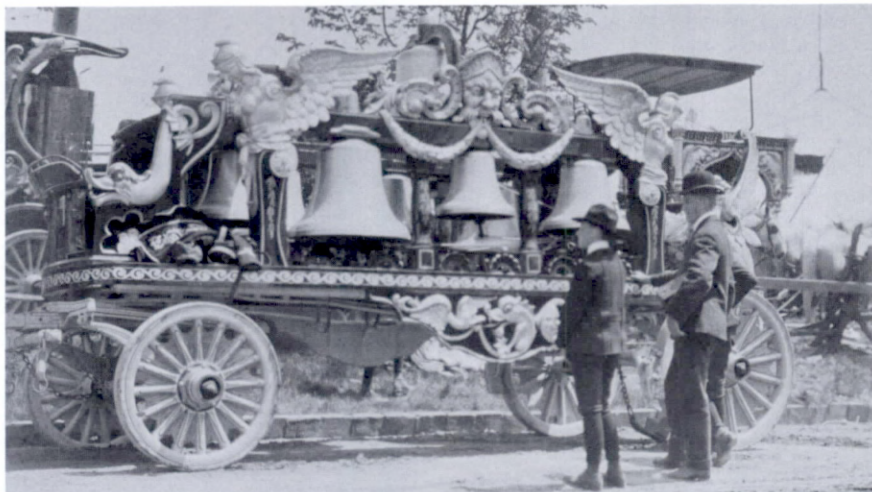
The only mishap in the ninety two year existence of the bell wagon occurred during its first season. The September 10, 1892 *Clipper* reported that it had tipped over on a bridge approach, landing on its top in a trench. It took all day to upright the vehicle due to the great weight of the bells. Fortunately no permanent damage was incurred.

The bell wagon was now part of a growing Ringling parade. By 1893 their parade featured four bandwagons, one being the Lion & Mirror, several tableaux and floats, a hippo den, a score of cages, an organ wagon, a steam calliope and the relatively new bell wagon. It continued to grow in length and splendor as the Ringlings prospered in the circus business.

Tracing the history of the bell wagon presents no major problems, primarily because it was never sold to another circus. For 92 years it has been a possession of the Ringling show or its descendant organizations, the longest period of single ownership in circus history. Beginning in 1892, the bell wagon was featured in Ringling parades for the next 20 years. A 1910 parade order included it, whereas a 1912 list does not, bracketing the last year of useage as 1910 or 1911. Presumably it was dropped from the show because it served only one purpose, the parade, and could not be used to carry baggage.

The only attempt by the Ringlings to sell the vehicle is recorded in a 1912 sale catalog offering the assets of the defunct 1910-1911 Forepaugh-Sells show. It was described as "One large Tableaux wagon carrying a set of big chime bells as are used in cathedrals and churches; wagon heavily carved; bells to be played by one man." The price, \$700, was the highest in the catalog, \$300 higher than the Forepaugh-Sells steam calliope, suggesting the Ringlings would sell it but only if a purchaser was willing to pay a considerable amount for it. The inclusion of the bell wagon on the Forepaugh-Sells list, the only identifiable ex-Ringling show wagon appearing on it, may indicate a transfer in 1911; however, the extensive investigations Richard E. Conover and Fred D. Pfening III conducted concerning the Forepaugh-Sells parade wagons failed to confirm its presence on the 1910-1911 reissue.

Between the 1902 and 1905 tours the bell wagon was extensively rebuilt, undoubtedly by the Moellers. The great weight of the bells had caused the wagon's frame to become swaybacked by



The earliest dateable view of the rebuilt bell wagon is this 1905 scene in Norwood, Ohio. Note how the carvings on the driver's and player's seat were interchanged. Albert Conover collection.

1900. The Ringlings took advantage of the repair necessity and extended the scope of the work to implement other changes. In addition to rebuilding the frame, the carvings and woodwork which comprised the driver's and player's seats were modified and swapped. The bell keyboard handles were raised, allowing the player to sit completely above the platform. The center bell was lowered and turned ninety degrees and the carved cap which adorned its top was permanently abandoned. These modifications, combined with a lengthening of the platform to over seventeen feet, resulted in a more aesthetically pleasing appearance than the original stubby looking design. Succeeding generations have viewed the wagon in this rebuilt configuration.

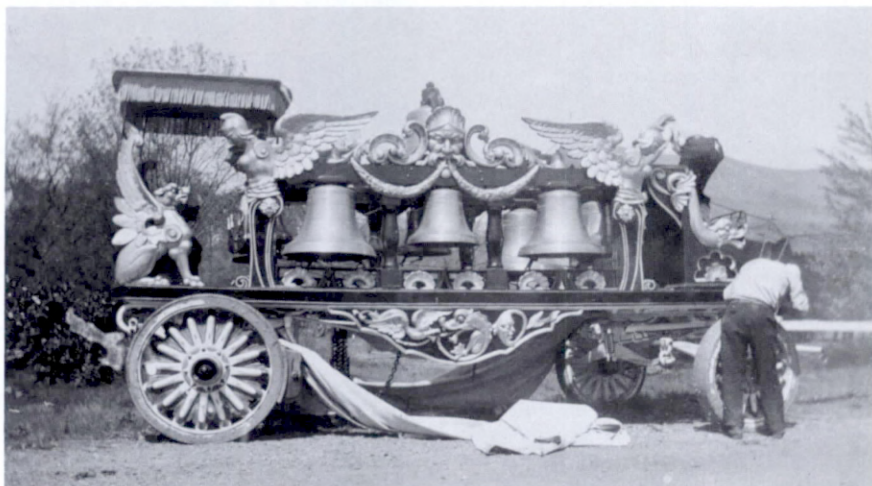
From 1911 or 1912 until 1934 the

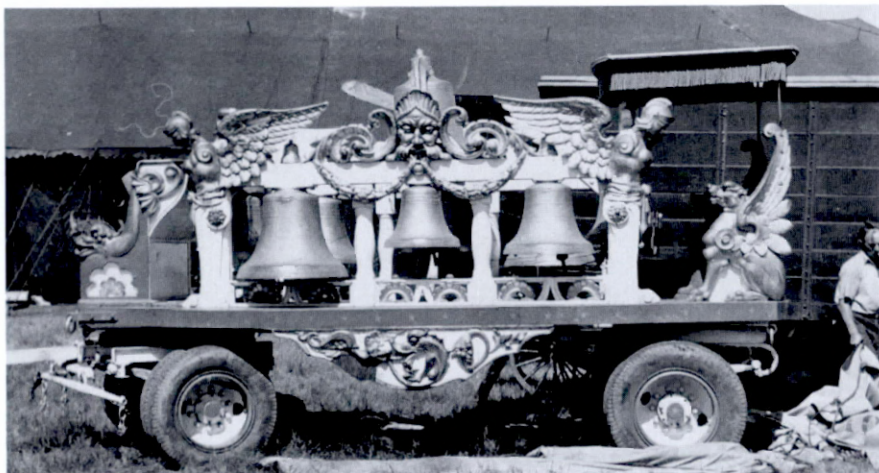
New wheels were installed on the bell wagon for its appearance on the 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace circus. The increased

wagon remained in storage and did not make any known public appearances. It was probably stored at the Baraboo winterquarters, in the company of many other retired Ringling wagons. Over the years, Henry Moeller, acting as agent for the Ringlings, sold quite a few of these wagons to other showmen, but none of the buyers secured the famed bell wagon. When the Ringling show played Baraboo in 1933, the year of its golden anniversary, a few old Ringling and Forepaugh-Sells floats were rolled out of the Ringling barns to the delight of visiting fans. It is surprising that the bell wagon was not displayed at this time. Perhaps there was a lack of motive power to move it, but more than likely it was already gone, transferred to Sarasota at an undetermined date after 1928, the year Ringling-Barnum moved its winterquarters out of Bridgeport, Connecticut to Florida.

The wagon was reportedly at Sarasota when Jess Adkins, manager of the Ringling owned Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, asked for it and the Five Graces bandwagon to be sent to Peru, Indiana

length of the vehicle is evident from this photograph. William Koford photograph, Albert Conover collection.





to join his show. Adkins was an adjuster on the Ringling show in the 1910's, perhaps the reason he was aware of the wagon's existence. In addition to the usual bandwagons, tableaux and cages found in most circus parades, Adkins' mammoth 1934 display also included air and steam calliopes, an una-fon and the old Ringling bell wagon, an array unmatched in any previous parade. The wagon was fitted with new wheels, slightly heavier than the originals, and received a coat of paint and a fringe for the player's canopy. It was a fine and unique addition to the Hagenbeck-Wallace lineup.

Dual pneumatic tires and a steel undergear were fitted to the bell wagon when it joined Ringling-Barnum in 1941. Fortunately, no modifications to the superstructure were made. Pfening Archives.

Sometime after the 1934 season the bell wagon was returned to Sarasota, there being no need for it on the subsequent versions of Hagenbeck-Wallace, none of which paraded. Photos of the wagon while stored at Peru are non-existent, but Gordon Potter recalls he measured the wagon at the quarters about 1936, indicating it was there for some time after the 1934 tour.

The wagon did not see further service until 1941, when John Ringling North decided it could be used in the Ringling-Barnum big top spectacles. To facilitate daily use of the bell wagon, the show replaced the wood undergear with steel members and installed dual pneumatic tires in lieu of the wagon wheels. This modification significantly altered the wagon's appearance, but the fact that it was going to be used insured its survival for a few more years. The bell wagon was utilized in nine out of the next twelve years, absent only between 1943 and 1945. It was used in the show specs, frequently being adorned with artificial decorations inspired by the spec theme.

Retired from the road following the 1952 tour, the wagon sat at Sarasota winterquarters until about 1956 when it was placed on exhibit at the Ringling Museum of the Circus. The wagon was a museum feature for twenty three years, reverting back to direct Ringling control in a 1979 agreement. Until it was brought to Baraboo, the bell wagon was stored in a Bradenton, Florida warehouse.

Many CHS members contributed to this article. A note of thanks is extended to the following people for their assistance; Joseph T. Bradbury, Fred D. Pfening Jr., Fred D. Pfening III, John Polacsek, Gordon Potter, Richard Reynolds and Dominic Yodice.

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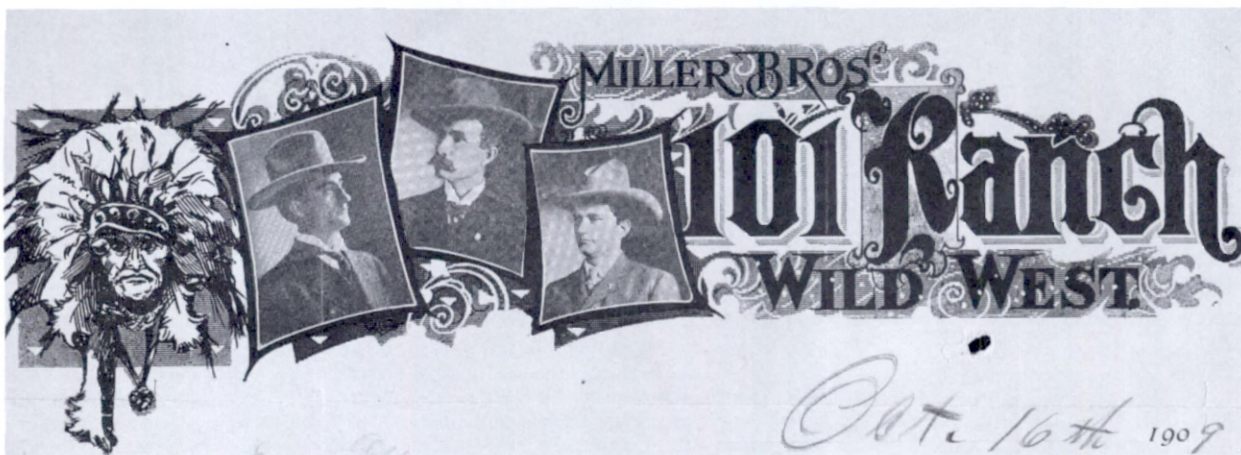
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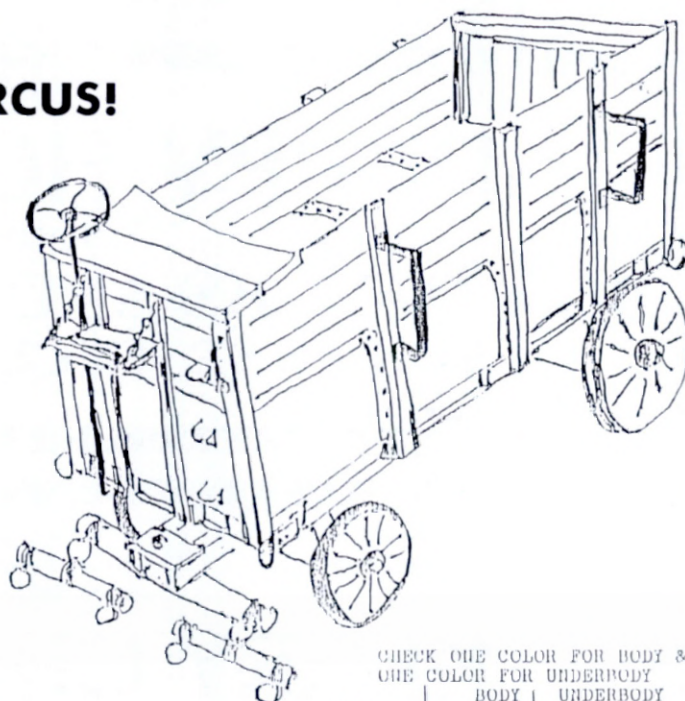
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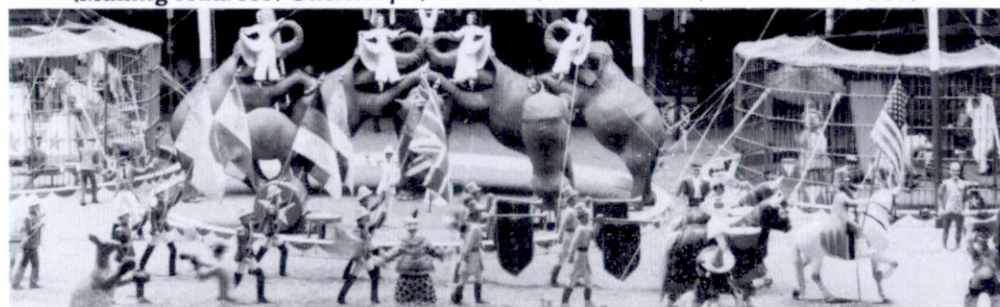
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CALLEYOPE

By Francis Beverly Kelley

Bev Kelley, press agent supreme, died earlier this year. Among his many gifts was his extraordinary talent as a writer of light fiction. Always full of rich and colorful metaphors, his fiction pieces are a delight. In their own way, his images evoke the world of the circus as well as any non-fiction.

The following was written in the early 1940s, probably 1941, apparently to promote the Ringling-Barnum Circus's revived use of the Twin Jesters calliope played by Cap Carroll. As nearly as can be ascertained, it has not been published until now. Readers should be reminded that this article was intended as a fantasy, and makes no claim to historical authenticity. That it contains factual errors is of no consequence; what matters is its emotional veracity.

This is the Circus Historical Society's tribute to Bev Kelley, a great circus man, and a great writer. It is published with the full approval of Ruth S. Kelley.

My name is Calliope.

You can call me Calliope if you want to. Lots of folks do. And I've even been called a "steam piano."

I'm nearly sixty years old, but I'm in pretty good shape except that my windpipes are a bit wheezy at times. People look at me and smile and say to each other that I'm old-fashioned, but that seems to be the way the folks who own me want me to look. You see, I'm an old circus calliope and this is my story.

I was born in 1884, which is a date important in circus history because that is the year when the Ringling Brothers started their show. But I was built for the Barnum & Bailey Circus. It was a big circus even back in those days. Skilled mechanics and master wagon builders made me and when I was completed I was as pretty a circus wagon as ever you set eyes upon.

My valves were silver and my teeth were ivory and my body bright red with gold figures carved on the outside. My feet were white wheels with orange sunburst centers and when I moved I rolled with the deep, hollow rumble of a circus wagon. There's no sound like the true rumble of a circus wagon. Maybe when your grandfather was a little, barefoot boy who had scrambled out of bed at the crack of dawn to watch the circus unload, he heard me rumble by. And maybe, later in the day, he stood along the curb and saw four beautiful horses pull me at the very end of the circus parade. I'll bet he heard me, too, because my shrill voice was the strongest in the whole circus. It was louder than

the trumpet of the biggest elephant or the roar of the wildest lion.

I whistled all the time. There was a young fellow named Charlie Carroll who put his fingers on my teeth and pressed down and made me whistle. His nickname was Cap. In the old days we whistled "Bicycle Built for Two" and "Camptown Races" and "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" and Irish airs like "The Wearin' O' The Green." Cap Carroll had to stuff cotton in his ears so my voice wouldn't make him deaf. But he was fond of me and he took good care of me, too, especially out west in the alkali country where my lungs were apt to get clogged up and my voice out of tune.



Cap Carroll, whose real name was Charles Carroll Mathewson, is shown at age 74 on the Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1942. Pfening Archives.

My great, great grandfather was invented by a man named Joshua Stoddard at Worcester, Massachusetts. They say he was trying to make a better whistle when he stumbled into the idea for my great, great grandfather. Mr. Stoddard was a religious man and so my great, great grandfather was a sort of a church organ. But he was not what you could call a success in his church work. They say that his voice was so loud that it just about blew the preacher out of the pulpit the very first Sunday and made him forget his sermon. So my great, great grandfather had to become a vagabond and, with a bright circus suit, he was sent out to follow the winding trail of the red wagons.

I guess I have some living relatives, although I never saw but two of them.

One was a distant cousin on a showboat that went up and down the Mississippi River. The other was an ill-mannered brat with another circus that exhibited in the same town our circus played 'long about 1891. Our parades crossed uptown about noontime and I heard the other calliope coming down the main street. Cap Carroll heard it, too. I remember he just smiled out of one corner of his mouth and put his hands gently on my keyboard. Then, just as the other calliope was beside us, he opened up and made me whistle so loud that we nearly blasted that sour-voiced young whippersnapper of a calliope clear off the street. The colored boy who was feeding coal into my iron stomach so I could keep full of steam got mighty weary that day.

I was still a young fellow when I began to notice that something had happened to my name. Calliope is a proud old name and comes from the first of the nine Muses in Greek mythology. But people started calling me Calliope. It began with the farmers who came to see the circus and then the show people took it up because they were amused, and before long they were saying Calliope whenever they mentioned me and hardly anybody bothered to call me Calliope anymore.

My second year was the time when P.T. Barnum brought Jumbo, the huge African elephant, from the London Zoo. We called the Barnum & London Circus "The Greatest Show on Earth" and scarcely anybody disputed the saying although in those early days there were some other big shows that your grandparents might remember. One was the Adam Forepaugh Circus and another was John Robinson's Circus.

Well, we traveled all over the country, in big towns and little towns. Some of them we visited every year and it made me feel good to see friendly old landmarks along the parade route. Every year I had a brand new suit. One season it would be red and gold and another time it would be silver and green and once it was blue and yellow. At night I rode with the other circus wagons on top of the long flatcars and my night-shirt was a canvas tarpaulin that protected me from the weather. Every morning during the street parade I whistled the popular tunes of the times, and when Jumbo got into an argument with a freight train at St. Thomas, Ontario, in 1885, and was killed, Cap made me whistle "Auld Lang Syne" to honor the biggest elephant the country ever had seen. We played that tune again six years later when P.T. Barnum passed on to the Big Lot, which is the name circus people have for Heaven.

I remember a Fourth of July when some of the elephants were frightened at firecrackers that some careless children had thrown at their feet. The great, lumbering titans stampeded through the menagerie tent and out onto the cir-

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cus grounds, upsetting small tents and lemonade stands and a wardrobe wagon in their path. Charlie Carroll did a brave thing that day. He saw that the elephants were headed straight for me and that they might overturn and break me. So he grabbed a heavy tent stake and climbed upon a property box near my head. When the first elephant came thundering toward me, Cap hit him over the head with a resounding thud. Stunned, the leader of the stampede wheeled around and headed off in another direction. The other runaway elephants followed him and I was saved.

Another exciting experience was when a big storm blew down some of the tents. The wind got into the dressing tent and lifted it up like a balloon and set it down on top of me. One of the poles knocked off part of the front of me where the driver sits, but otherwise I was not damaged.

In the late nineties we went to Europe and we stayed for several years. A steam calliope was a total stranger in those far countries and people marveled at me and danced in the streets to my merry piping. Forty horses were hitched to our big bandwagon and the parade was so gorgeous that in one country we had to discontinue the free street procession. People had made up their minds that we couldn't possibly have anything better to offer than the parade and so they were staying away from our regular performances under the big tents.

We came back from abroad after the turn of the century and one day I whistled "Auld Lang Syne" again because James A. Bailey, whom people called "The Little Irishman," was dead. Now the Ringling Brothers, whose show had grown as big as ours, bought the Barnum & Bailey Circus. They operated the circuses separately until 1919 at which time they were united to form one gigantic circus as you know it today: Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows.

I remember the year 1920 very well

Brought out of retirement in 1941, the Two Jesters calliope was featured in the Ringling-Barnum spec Old King Cole, Pfening Archives.

because that was the year my luck ran out. You see, I was being pulled from the show grounds to the circus railroad trains late one night in a southern city and we had to go down a steep hill. My brakes didn't work and I started traveling faster than the horses could run.

Bev Kelley in the Ringling-Barnum backyard about the time he wrote this story. On his left is Leonard Aylesworth, Ringling-Barnum lot superintendent who along with Charley Lucky built the Two Jesters calliope on Sells Floto in the early 1920s.



Soon I bumped into the wheel team and knocked one of them down in the street. Poor fellow, he was skinned up pretty bad, but no bones were broken.

I didn't fare so well, I rolled on down the hill and into a steep embankment where one of my sides was splintered. My undercarriage was not harmed, however, so they hitched another team to pull me and brought a pair of elephants to hold me back as we went slowly down to the bottom of the slope. I was rolled onto the train, but next morning they didn't unload me as usual for the parade. Instead, they called a consultation and Cap went over my insides just like a doctor would. He said I was sorely shaken up and probably would sound sour. The wagon builder said he couldn't very well repair me while the show was moving at the rate of a new town every day and, anyhow, the tour was about over. So I was shipped back to the circus winter quarters to wait until the next season.

Then my luck turned really bad. That next season the Ringlings decided there was too much traffic on the principal streets of the big cities, and they would not have a street parade. I was left in the wagon shed at winter quarters. That spring, when the show entrained, was a sad time for me. Cap Carroll felt bad, too. He came to see me and his fingers touched my silent keyboard and there were tears in his eyes when he went away. They had given him a job as a ticket seller.

I lost track of time after that. The circus came and went, year in and year out. Nobody paid any attention to me except Cap who visited me occasionally. Once he said, "Never mind, Old Timer; sometime calliopes will come back in style and we'll show 'em we're just as good as ever."

I needed a new suit of paint and my boiler was rusty and I was ashamed to have Cap see me looking so shabby. But the years had left their mark on him, too. He didn't come back after that and more years rolled by. The Ringling Brothers were all dead and I heard that their nephews, John and Henry North, were running the show and that it had been "streamlined," whatever that means. I heard they had a big gorilla who was as great an attraction as Jumbo had been, but of course I couldn't see any of these things in the wagon shed where I rested, an old, forgotten trouper.

One day in 1941, I had a dream. I dreamed that Cap and I were back in the circus again and that children were dancing along beside us at the end of the parade. I was whistling with all my might when something tapped on my side and awakened me. A man with a hammer was pounding me as I stood there in the shed and another man said, "I guess the old wreck can be put into shape. I wonder who we can get to play it."

If I had had any steam in my lungs I could have whistled for joy! I was going out with the circus again! Oh, how I wished I could tell them that Cap Carroll and none other was the man they were looking for. Then a terrible thought struck me. It was a long, long time since Cap and I had gone whistling through the streets together. He would be an old man now. What if he were not living?

They repaired my broken side and put rubber soles on my feet and a mechanic went over my insides. They decided to feed me oil so they wouldn't have to carry coal and a fireman. White and gold paint made me a nice, new suit and four fine Clydesdale horses were taught to pull me. I was loaded on the circus train and sent to Madison Square Garden in New York City where the show plays its first engagement every tour. This was not the Garden I remembered. It was a newer, bigger building, but the sights and sounds and smells of the circus had not changed much and I was happy.

I learned that the circus had not revived its old street parades, but I was to be used in the performance at the end of a wonderful Mother Goose pageant in which the nursery rhyme characters were portrayed by animals, floats, clowns and other circus people. The old Ringling chime wagon told me this. She was an old friend from the parade days and had been reconditioned as I had been. The idle years were long and tiresome for her, too, and her lot had been worse than mine because she had been stored away far from circus winter quarters. She had not seen an elephant in more than twenty years! The chime wagon was to lead the Mother Goose



In 1942 the Two Jesters was specially decorated for the Holidays spec and played by Cap Carroll. Pfening Archives.

procession, her mellow bells ringing out Victor Herbert's "March of the Toys" while my piping tunes were to be "Mary Had A Little Lamb," "Three Blind Mice" and "Pop Goes the Weasel."

In all the excitement of seeing my old friend, the chime wagon, I had quite forgotten that I couldn't whistle all by myself. Somebody would have to put his hands on my teeth and make music. One of the men from the circus band climbed into the bell wagon and started to practice, but nobody paid any attention to me.

Then an old man came up and looked at me. He put his hand on my new suit of white and gold and went away. He didn't look like a member of the band.

He returned a moment later with a little stepladder and climbed up through the oval opening in my side and into the seat behind my keyboard. He put his hands on my ivory teeth and then I knew! This little old man was Cap!

He was stooped and his hair was white and his face was wrinkled, but it was Cap. No other fingers would ever feel like Cap's. He told the man in charge of the boiler to get up some steam and then what do you suppose Cap did? The very first number he played was "Auld Lang Syne!"

"Should old acquaintance be forgot—" I whistled away, almost bursting with gladness, and Cap was smiling and circus people crowded around us, cheering and grinning at old Cap.

So if you happen to see us in the circus someday, remember that Cap and I are the oldest in the business — and surely the happiest.

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